





IN DAYS THAT ARE DEAD

Books by Sir Hugh Clifford

MALAYAN MONOCHROMES

THE DOWNFALL OF THE GODS

FURTHER INDIA

STUDIES IN BROWN HUMANITY

THE FURTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

IN DAYS THAT ARE DEAD

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BY
SIR HUGH CLIFFORD

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A collection of short stories based upon personal knowledge. They illustrate with convincing realism the hazardous life and the hardships of British men and women forty years ago in Malaya and North Borneo.

Short stories

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FOREWORD

SOME years ago, I prepared for publication in the United States of America a volume entitled "The Further Side of Silence." It consisted of a number of sketches and stories, selected from some of my earlier books, and it was designed to illustrate the condition of things that obtained in the Malayan Peninsula in the days prior to the extension of British "protection" to that remote corner of Asia. I had had a very close first-hand experience of the things of which I told during a period of twenty years which began in 1883; and having emerged from the experience a convinced imperialist, I cherished the hope that I might perhaps be able to convince some who had not shared my exile that there was a solid justification for our interference with the eccentricities of native rule, and that it had at the back of it something more altruistic than any motive of material exploitation or territorial expansion.

The state of affairs which my stories attempted to picture has long ago passed away, and now the Malayan Peninsula is as peaceful and secure a domicile for rich and poor, weak and powerful alike as any part of this well-explored and much administered planet. My stories, therefore, are chiefly of value as historical

documents, in which are enshrined records of a vanished past, and this applies in equal measure to the present collection.

On this occasion I have brought together a number of tales which illustrate the life of the British men and women who, some forty years ago, lived and toiled in southeastern Asia to make actual the transformations to which I have above referred. For their successors of to-day, life in Malaya and in North Borneo has undergone many changes and much amelioration since the time of which my stories tell, and unromantic economic troubles, occasioned by the ever-increasing cost of living, have replaced the dangers and hazards of the past. The tremendous developments resulting from the opening up of local resources by the tin miner and the rubber planter, the construction of railways into the most remote parts of the interior, the extension of motor traffic in every direction, and many other changes of a similar character have combined to render all parts of the country easily and speedily accessible. They have greatly enhanced the wealth of the indigenous population, but the haste and hurry of modern conditions have proved destructive of the close intimacy and sympathy which of old prevailed between the natives of the land and the British officers who tramped through and camped in their villages. The motor car alone has done more to divorce the Asiatic peasant from the men who are responsible for his affairs than all the other revolutions in fact and in idea that have been packed into the last quarter of a century. The comfort of the individual European has thereby been

immensely increased, but the deep knowledge of the people which their forerunners possessed has proportionately diminished. The complications of the life of to-day preclude the close attention to detail which formerly was the keystone of our administrative structure in the East.

For the rest, the stories in this book will perhaps be found to possess a certain interest as pictures of men and things as I knew and saw them in days that are forever dead.

HUGH CLIFFORD.

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IN DAYS THAT ARE DEAD

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RACHEL

I

THEY are so dreadfully far away," she murmured plaintively—"ever so much further away than they used to be."

Her words—the expression of a thought which almost without her volition had framed itself in speech—fell upon the heavy quiet of the veranda softly as a sigh.

The man in the long cane chair at her side started, dropped the book which he had been reading upon his knee, keeping a finger on the page to mark his place, and gazed at her vaguely through absorbed, half-seeing eyes under a knitted brow. He was trying, with obvious effort, to make the words which had filtered into his ears stamp some actual impression upon a brain deeply engaged in other things. His was a gnarled and rugged face, furrowed by hard lines such as care, responsibility, and thought are wont to trace. During the slight pause which supervened before he spoke, the world without, under the luminous darkness of the tropic night, seemed to pant through the hot, still, scent-

laden air, as though spent with travail. The insistent notes of insects were blent in a rumour of sound, faint yet restless. Somewhere in the distance savage drums pulsed and throbbed.

"Who is further from what?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, dear," said the woman with a half sigh. "I didn't mean to interrupt you. I was only thinking aloud."

"But what was it you said?" he insisted.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. I was only being stupid."

"I wish you would tell me," he urged, laying the book aside with a reluctance which his masculine clumsiness had not the wit to conceal. "I want to know."

"I was only saying what I have said a thousand times—that they are so dreadfully far away; that they are so much further off than they used to be."

"The children?" he queried, and his voice fell at the word.

"The children," she assented with a sort of yearning tenderness, her hands knotted about her knee, her eyes gazing out unseeingly into the darkness of the night.

There was again a slight pause before he spoke, and a little puff of exhausted breeze, hot and empty to the lungs as the draught from a furnace, brought the thrumming of the drums nearer for an instant, the savage rhythm rising in menacing clamour to sink again into a far-away pulse beat.

"I don't understand," he said. "They have always been at the other end of the earth." In his voice there was the bitterness of pain.

"It isn't the distance," she said. "It is that they are

growing away from us. They aren't now the children we parted from three years ago. We don't even know what they are like."

The man winced.

"I wish you would go home, darling," he said. "I should get on all right, and—and I should see them through your eyes."

"Yes, and you would work twelve hours a day, and read all meal-time, or forget that there is such a thing as food, and the servants would maltreat you, and you would never notice it, and then you would get ill, and—oh, it is all impossible! Don't ask me to leave you. I can't do it. Anything is better than that."

She rose from her chair, walked to his side, seated herself upon a stool, and rested her head against his knee, holding his strong, sensitive hands in her soft fingers.

"God bless you, sweetheart," he said gruffly. "I'm not worth it all, and—oh, you ought to go home! I wish you would go home!"

He had an insequent feeling that if she and the little ones were together in the pleasant English country, while he remained out there in the sun glare to toil for them, all the pain, all the burden, would be his alone. Endurance would be easy, he thought, if he could take the whole suffering upon himself—if he could be spared the sight of her agony, of all that she bore so bravely, so uncomplainingly, so patiently. He could never quite realize that to her, separation from the children, bad as it was, would be outweighed by that other pain which would be caused by separation from him.

"You always say that," she said now, almost indignantly. "You make it impossible for me to speak to you about the children because, whenever I mention them, you cry out that I ought to go home—that I ought to leave you."

"Oh, it is all such a mess!" he exclaimed fiercely. "A man who is doomed to exile in the East—exile for all his days—has no right to ask any girl to share his life with him! What a monstrous selfishness it is! What a coxcomb a man must be who imagines even for a moment that his love—his *love!*—can compensate for all the sacrifice, all the pain, all the—— Oh, it's incredible, incredible!"

"And yet it does," she said softly; and the pressure on his fingers tightened.

"It doesn't—it can't! A man has his work, the work that claims him body and soul, the work which is the best anæsthetic of all. A woman has nothing—only empty days—such long, cruel hours in which to think and think—empty days and such woefully empty arms."

"Don't," she whispered. "It is just as bad for you as for me"; and her voice was caught with sobs.

Long they sat there, with the wilderness of the East lying around them, filled with sounds incomprehensible, mysterious, vaguely inimical, with the little drawing room behind them gay with the prettiness of dainty feminine contrivance, striking by contrast to its environment, such a pathetic note in the very futility of the effort to create the illusion that exile is home for which it stood. Long the man petted, soothed, tried to com-

fort her, mocking himself grimly in his heart the while, because he knew that sorrow such as theirs is impossible of alleviation, while she sought bravely to cheat him and herself into a faith in a non-existent happiness.

"When is your birthday?" he asked inconsequently, when at last they rose up and turned toward their bedroom.

"On the 15th of March—the month after next," she said. "But what has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, darling," he replied. "I was only wondering. Shall I ring for the boys to shut up the house?"

II

"Many happy returns of the day, sweetheart," he said, coming into her bedroom, bearing in his arms a loaded tray. "See, I have brought you your *chota hazri* myself."

"Oh, and what is this parcel? How 'acting'! as the children used to say. Give me your knife; I want to undo the string at once."

"Oh, no. Take your tea first. The parcel will keep."

"It will do nothing of the sort. Give me your knife at once. Oh, you darling. What a lovely silver bowl! Real old workmanship. Why, it must have cost a mint, you extravagant boy."

He stooped to take the kiss she offered him in thanks, and then turned away rather shamefacedly.

"Look inside it," he said gruffly.

She twisted off the lid and found a folded piece of paper covered with his fine handwriting, and this is what she read:

HOME

To My Own Darling on Her Birthday

Cold and fog and a leaden sky
O'er pavements drizzle-damped;
The clatter of footsteps passing by,
The coster's yell and the street-boy's cry,
The roadway packed and cramped,
The newsboys bawling the lists of the dead—
'Tis a mightier, drearier, dingier Rome,
That wonderful land where we twain were wed—
The land called Home.

A nursery lit by the merriest sun,
For two little sunbeams are there;
A nursery ringing with laughter and fun,
And the last, last romp that will never be done,
And the pranks of an impish pair.
Here's General Buller astride of a stick,
O'er the hearth rug the cavalry speed—
Turn away, dear Love, for the heart grows sick,
To us that were Home indeed.

Green-clad slopes, where the thatched huts cling;
A sea that is smooth as glass;
Forest on forest, where no birds sing
As they sing at Home in the English spring,
When the dew is fresh on the grass.
Merciless sunshine, pitiless glare
Rack the land which we still must roam,
But with thee at hand my days to share
Exile itself is Home.

A little sob from the bed caused him to turn about sharply upon his heel. Her face was pressed against the pillow; her shoulders rose and fell; she was weeping

very bitterly, very quietly. In an instant, he was at her side, his arms about her, his kisses upon her hair, while he cried out against himself in fierce reproach for a dolt and a fool.

"Don't cry, darling," he whispered. "I would not make you cry for worlds. I meant it to please you. What a stupid brute I am, thrusting my great clumsy finger into the open wound!"

"It isn't that—it isn't that!" she protested, looking up at him through her tears. "I love them—they are beautiful. It is because they are so beautiful that they make me cry!"

Loving women, mercifully for the men whose verses are turned to pleasure them, are not exacting critics of the literary value of such offerings.

"I love them," she said again, though a sob still lingered; and she kissed them.

Sitting there on the sheets which, bare of bedclothes, held no suggestion of the cosy repose of temperate climates, dressed in her white nightgown, with her little bare feet drawn up under her, and gazing up at him through wide eyes on which the dew of tears still rested, she seemed to him such a child, such a poor little thing, such a pathetic and pitiful little creature to be called upon by Fate to endure so much. As he looked at her, there was a hard something in his own throat, and his face worked.

"I love them—love them," she repeated. "Only they are—too sad. And besides, I—I—— They show me so plainly how very far the chicks have drifted from us. We haven't seen them since the end of '99. Three

whole years ago! They were babies then: they will never—be—be babies any more. Now—now they are strangers to us both. They don't play like that—like babies—like they used to play—any—any more!" And again the sobs shook her.

He had not thought of that. When he had tried to draw for her in words a picture of the nursery—their nursery—as it had been when last he had looked upon it, it had not occurred to him that three years—so long a time in the life of a child—had come and gone since then, and had wrought changes there, as elsewhere—nay, had altered the scene his memory cherished out of all recognition. He saw it all now, had always seen it, as it had been then—the two mites, blissfully unconscious of what was befalling them, wild with excitement at the prospect of seeing the baggage piled on to the roofs of the cabs, their shouts of pleasure stabbing deep at the heart of the mother who stood watching them with yearning, stricken eyes! And that scene had vanished for ever! It was three whole years ago! The boy was at a preparatory school by this time. No more playing at General Buller astride on a walking-stick for him! A true realization of the fact came to him suddenly, smote him shrewdly, and the lump in his throat grew harder. He had known that there must be change, of course—that he and she were missing precious years of baby life that could never be recalled; but the full meaning, the full pathos of it all, had never struck him as it did now. It came in some sort as a revelation to him, that change. Yet she had been watching it daily, hourly—watching it, in imagination,

transforming, working cruel havoc upon her darlings; for she—poor soul!—had been thinking, thinking, while he had been deep in affairs, numbed and blinded by the work which was to him as the breath of his nostrils. The lump rose more rebelliously than ever.

“But my real birthday present is yet to come,” he said presently, anxious to divert her thoughts and his own from that which the fatal verses had awakened. “I have kept it a secret all this time because I wanted it to come as a surprise; and if that infernal French mail had not been late again, it would have been here the day before yesterday. Guess what it is.”

“No, tell me. I’m not good at guessing.” She feared to ask whether the unknown gift was the thing for which above everything she longed, lest she should be disappointed, and so be the cause of disappointment to him.

“Well, then, I’ll tell you. I wrote to Catherine two months ago and sent her money to have the children photographed by some first-class man.”

Catherine was his maiden sister, a woman some years his senior, in whose conscientious but unsympathetic care the children had been left. She was no child-lover—indeed, she was singularly free from all such tender weaknesses—but she prided herself upon her sense of duty, and regarded her charges as a cross laid upon her for her sins.

“Oh, you darling! That is the one thing I have been simply *pinning* for, and I didn’t like to ask for it because of the dreadful expense.”

“But that isn’t all. I sent enough for Catherine to

get miniatures painted from them, and the whole thing ought to have been here a couple of days ago. Isn't it bad luck that the mail is late?"

She didn't answer this time, but clung to him with her face buried on his breast, though now there was no bitterness in her tears.

"And how shall I manage to live until the mail comes in?" she said presently as she began to dress.

III

Through the heavy stillness of the noontide, a gun boomed out, and at the sound her heart stood still, then bounded on again, racing with a joy that yet had in it the pain of intensified expectation.

"The mail at last!" she cried; then flung herself upon her knees, and thanked God for His goodness to her.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, and she was roaming up and down her bungalow with a sort of fierce unrest, as caged creatures prowl for ever in their narrow prisons. With a clatter of hoofs her husband rode up on his pony.

"I have shirked shamelessly," he said with a laugh. "I don't often play truant, but I just had to be here with you when the mail arrived. They are sorting the letters now. They will be up in a minute."

"Thank God!" she said faintly, for her excitement made her weak; but still the words were a prayer.

They sat down in two chairs upon the veranda, and each took up a book and made believe to read. Outside, the sun beat down upon a panting world, in which all living things cowered hidden from its anger, while

the leaves and the palm fronds stiffened and lifted beneath the parching rays. The thin, exhausted air hung above the earth, pressing upon it, stifling it. There came no sound to break the painful silence save the slow ticking of a clock and now and again the dry rustle of soil, which, crumbling in the heat, detached itself from a bank in the garden and slid downward. The moments—long drawn out by the intensity of suspense—crawled with merciless deliberation. Every few seconds, he or she looked up from the pages which held for them no meaning, and cast anxious glances at the clock face, where the minute hand appeared to be stationary. It seemed to them that the longed-for time would never come which should bring them the mail bag for which they looked. Every succeeding mail day they endured something of this agony of anticipation; but to-day the pain of waiting was keener, more difficult of endurance than ever before.

At last the sound of bare feet sauntering up the gravel path without came to their listening ears. The man jumped to his feet, walked hastily to the edge of the veranda, and something like a shout of joy went up from him as he saw the orderly, mail bag on shoulder, coming with irritating slowness up the approach to the house. Immediately, with clamorous execrations, his indolence was goaded into an indifferent energy, an indolent speed. Rachel pressed both her hands to her heart. She felt physically faint now that the supreme moment had come.

The man plunged headlong down the stairs and reappeared a moment later, his face flushed with excite-

ment, the mail bag swinging triumphantly in his grasp.

"You must open it, sweetheart," he almost panted. "Here's the best birthday present of all!"

She took the bag with eager, trembling fingers, thrust her arm elbow-deep into it, with the light of a great joy in her eyes. For a moment or two she rummaged among its contents, and the expression of her face changed rapidly from hope to anxiety, from anxiety to a kind of terror, to dismay, to utter blank despair. She looked up at her husband through eyes that were pitiful to see, so sad and full of pain they were.

"They are not here," she said in a strained whisper.

"They must be!" he said savagely, taking the bag from her with a roughness which was almost a snatch. The colour of a moment earlier had left his cheeks: the lines upon his face were deep and hard of a sudden, as though they had been chiselled in stone. With feverish haste, he tipped the contents of the bag out on to the floor. There fell forth a number of newspapers, one or two magazines, some books, and a slender bundle of letters, with English stamps and postmarks, tied with a piece of twine—but there was nothing that could contain either photographs or miniatures.

With a bitter curse he threw himself into a chair. His wife sat rigid, with clasped hands. No word escaped her. The pain of her disappointment, intensified by the keen anticipation which had preceded it, numbed, while it stabbed her to the heart. She shed no tear, made no complaint, uttered no blasphemy such as her husband had used, even in her heart. Only she

sat very still and endured this bitter blow with a conscious resistant effort.

After a pause, the man rose to his feet with something that was more groan than sigh, and began listlessly to examine the bundle of letters.

"Here is one from Catherine," he said sulkily. "Perhaps it will explain. Umph"—as he opened it—"only a page. I wish she would tell us more about them. Catherine never could write a letter."

"Read it," said his wife.

He began obediently:

"MY DEAR MARTIN:

"We have been having a deplorably wet winter, and I am sure that you and Rachel are to be congratulated upon being able to live in a more congenial climate. ["Damn the climate!" he interjected.] As I think I told you in my last, the rain obliged me to keep William ["Oh, I *wish* she wouldn't call my little Boysie 'William'!" murmured Rachel, in plaintive protest]—to keep William indoors during the greater part of his vacation—an arrangement which did not conduce to his amusement or to the comfort of myself and my household. William has now returned to school, where no doubt he will benefit from masculine control and discipline. I fear that William is of a somewhat turbulent disposition, and his persistent neglect to wipe his shoes and to shut doors after him shows less consideration for others than I should wish to see. ["Poor mite! He is only nine!" protested Rachel.] Mary Anne ["She shan't call my Maisie 'Mary Anne'!" cried Rachel. "You know what she is," growled her husband. "Catherine hates what she calls 'corruptions of proper names.' You can't make her different at her time of life." "Go on," said Rachel with a sigh]—Mary Anne, I am glad to say, is developing many estimable qualities. Her disposition is sedate and naturally ladylike. I trust that she

will grow up to be a comfort and a support to Rachel. Tell the latter that, though it is natural and proper that she should desire to have her children with her, she is spared by circumstances many anxieties and trials as well as responsibilities which I find to be inseparable from the care of children. She should remember this when she is inclined, as I gather from your letters is occasionally the case, to be discontented.

"I shall have to be in London lodgings from the middle of April until the end of the May meetings this year, and this will prevent me from taking in William for the Easter vacation. I have therefore arranged for the dear boy to remain at school, where he will no doubt be quite happy. Mary Anne I am sending for these few weeks to my old maid-servant Thatcher ["That horrible old Gorgon!" cried Rachel in horrified protest], who, you may remember, married Mr. Bently, a farmer at Uxmore, a man of high principle and conduct. Mary Anne's character gives me confidence that she will not take any harm from a temporary association with people of an inferior class, the more so since Mr. Bently is a churchwarden, and both he and his wife are very austere religious. I trust that these arrangements will meet with your approval.

"Give my love to Rachel, and hoping that you continue to enjoy good health,

"Believe me your affectionate sister,

"CATHERINE ALLISTER."

"And not a word about the photographs!" cried Rachel.

"Wait: here's a postscript.

"P. S. I have noted your wish that the children should be photographed, and I hope that an opportunity may occur during the summer vacation. These holidays, the inclemency of the weather, which greatly affected my movements owing to my susceptibility to influenza, made it quite out of

the question that I should attend to the matter at once. The delay, however, will be trifling, and it is possible that the children may themselves have improved in appearance by that time. I shall not have Mary Anne done by herself, as it will be less trouble to get them both taken at the same time, and it will be cheaper if you have them photographed together. As for the miniatures, you will, if guided by me, abandon the idea. Even my natural affection cannot blind me to the fact that they are not pretty, even as the standard of childish prettiness is judged—a by no means exacting standard; and it appears to me that a miniature, to be worth the money paid for it—some £5 5s. each—should at least be an ornament to your drawing room. However, you will have ample time in which to acquaint me by letter with your wishes upon this point; and if you insist, the miniatures shall, of course, be painted.—C. A.”

The man threw the letter on to the ground and swore again.

“Six whole months before we can hope to get them,” sighed Rachel. “Six whole months! What a weary time!”

Once more her husband swore, deeply, gruffly, with emphasis and meaning.

“And my poor little Boysie left at school for his holidays! And my little girl put out to board with an abominable Low Church couple who will restrain her and repress her and do their best to make her stiff and artificial and—and ‘ladylike’! Oh, my poor little motherless bairns. My poor little motherless babies!” And she buried her face in her hands, though still the relief of tears was denied to her.

“And there is not a single word in the whole letter which tells us what we most want to know,” said the

man savagely. "Not a line that gives us a *picture* of the chickies as they are, which shows us what they are developing into." He realized now with a certain bitterness that it was due to Catherine's limitations, as well as his own, that the fact that his children were changing had come upon him suddenly as a surprise, a shock. Why could not the woman have enough imagination to understand what sort of things the hungering father and mother most desired to hear? Why were her letters so unsympathetic, so tactless, so empty? He was filled with a strong resentment against his sister, to whom Fate had given the precious charge of his little ones—that which would have been such a blessing to poor Rachel, that which to her was only a burden.

"There is not a thing in the whole screed that tells us a word of the children—really," he repeated.

"Except Boysie's dirty boots and unshut doors, poor little duck!" said Rachel, with a wan smile.

For a space, there was silence: then the man spoke again.

"All this seems to me to point to something," he said grimly. "What do you think?"

"Don't!" said his wife sharply. She gave a little shudder, and in her eyes was a look which was all dismay. Suddenly a foreknowledge had come to her of that which the future must hold for her and for him.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff," he said gloomily. "You must go home. They are older now, and need you even more than I do. They are no longer babies. Don't interrupt," he added quickly, as she made as

though she would speak. "We won't talk of it now. I must get back to my grindstone, you to your thinking. It seems to me that the right path—the path before us—is marked out all too clearly, and that we must take it, be it never so hard to tread."

He stooped and kissed her lips with a tenderness that had in it something new, something more clinging, more claiming than ordinary.

"God guide and help you, wife!" he said.

IV

It was mail day once more in the little bungalow—a mail day which saw the arrival of an incoming, the departure of an outgoing, mail, and which also chanced to fall upon a Sunday. Time, some eighteen leaden-footed months, had passed, and on the man's surroundings its ravages had been aided by neglect and by the absence of the inspiring feminine genius of the house. The cretonnes and draperies of the drawing room were just as Rachel had left them, but their colour had faded, their freshness was gone, and dust had gathered deeply where of old no speck had been suffered to remain. The litter of books and papers on tables, chairs, and floors; the disorderly disarray of the furniture, each article left standing at the angle at which it had happened to be thrust aside; an empty glass which had been used on the preceding evening and which had not been cleared away; ash trays overfull, vases without flowers—these and a hundred other things betrayed the untidy bachelor household which had been evolved gradually from the ruins of Rachel's dainty little domain—that

most cheerless, most pathetic of all dreary masculine establishments, the home of the married solitary in the East.

Martin Allister sat at his writing table in a corner of the veranda, like Marius amidst the ruins of Carthage. His only garments were a pair of flannel trousers, yellow and shrunken with age and from the hard usage which they had received at the hands of the station *dhobi*, and a torn silk singlet from the front of which more than one button was missing. His bare feet were thrust into slippers; he held an extinguished pipe between his teeth; and upon his chin there was a stubble of beard some three days old. He looked as unkempt, as uncared-for as the comfortless house in which he lived. "Woefully gone to seed," would have been the verdict passed upon him by the least critical of observers.

Yet to-day he had as nearly touched happiness as now was possible to him, since the home mail, for the coming of which alone he lived from week to week, had arrived that morning some hours earlier than had been anticipated, and had brought him the usual priceless budget from Rachel. He was reading it through now for the third time, finding in the words of the one soul who loved him, was in complete sympathy with him, and to whom that love and sympathy gave a wonderful understanding and insight, exactly that which he most desired to know concerning his children, a series of living pictures of them as they now were. Yet of Rachel herself, who was so infinitely more dear to him than her little ones, the letter afforded no equally illuminating glimpse. The children stood out from the

pages vivid, alive, distinct. He seemed to know them now as he had never known them before, to picture their actions, to understand their characters, to rejoice with them in their pleasures, feel for and with them in their childish griefs, to glory in their impish naughtiness, and to lament over their occasional punishments. But throughout the figure of his wife eluded him. She wrote with strong self-repression, fearing, doubtless, to add to the burden of his sorrows by dwelling upon those which she was called upon to endure. There was a false air of cheerfulness in every line, a gallant striving to appear light-hearted, which, while it was powerless to deceive him, created an impression of unreality, plunged him in a haze of doubt and of conjecture, wherein the figure of the wife whom he had known became shadowy or was lost. She had been used to deal with him so frankly, to show him all that was in her heart: now he was conscious that she kept her deepest feelings closely hidden from him, lest a revelation of them should increase his pain.

“God help us!” he said half aloud, as he laid the letter aside and sat motionless, sunken deep in thought. “We are drifting—drifting apart. I can see the chick-ies through her eyes. She has brought *them* nearer to me than ever before, but—I am losing her. Loss and gain—loss and gain; and the loss is ever the greater. God help us both!”

He fell to thinking ruefully of the time, which now seemed so long ago, the golden time when for a little space Rachel and her children had been with him in the house in which he now lived in such bitter loneliness

and exile. He opened his desk and drew from it some verses which he had scribbled on the previous evening:

THE HOUSE TOO FULLY TENANTED

“The house is empty!”—thus they speak
Who pity one that sits alone,
And worships at an altar stone
All cold, where now he may not seek
The dear idols that have flown.
They cannot know how loud to me
The silence speaks of thine and thee!

If they spake truly, I could bear
The pall of silence that is cast
Athwart this casket of the Past,
And shrouds dead days that were so fair—
Those happy days too dear to last!
But this sad house is filled for me
With flitting wraiths of thine and thee!

Still voices sound from dawn to night,
And then till daybreak tints the sky;—
A little groping baby cry,
And childish laughter that made bright
The heart that heard. But now I sigh
And bid them cease: for, dear, to me
Too loud they speak of thine and thee!

Without the door there comes the sound
Of pattering steps and tiny feet,
And thinking now at last to meet
The babes I love, I turn me round . . .
No soul there moves! My senses cheat
With hopes all vain. Old use, ah, me,
Fills empty space with thine and thee!

But, more than all, *thy* face is near—
The sweet, dear eyes whereout there springs
The soul that upward soars and sings,
So that I marvel it can bear
To stoop to me and common things.
In pain or grief, where'er I be,
Thy love upholds and comforts me.

Yes, though to-day the thought is pain
Of those who are so far away,
Our ten years' ghosts I would not lay,
Nor have my lone life back again.
All pain were nought if, as I pray,
My God will yet vouchsafe to me
One hour of life with thine and thee!

He read the verses through slowly, sucking at his empty pipe the while; and, for all their roughness, it seemed to him that they told the story of the feelings that possessed him better than he could ever tell it by letter and in prose. And then the memory came to him of certain other verses which he had written for Rachel, and of the sob from the bed which had brought him to her side full of passionate sympathy and self-reproach.

"They would only make her unhappy," he thought. "They would do no good, bring her no comfort; for she knows how I love her, without fresh telling. Besides, I should not be at hand to dry the tears this time."

He tore the paper into tiny shreds, threw them into the wastepaper basket, and, lighting his pipe, set himself down squarely to write the concluding paragraphs of his weekly journal to his wife—one of those letters which always made her laugh as she read them, and left her so sad and so unsatisfied.

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"I must do nothing to make it worse for her," was the thought in his mind.

V

At the window of her cottage, overlooking the bay at Lyme Regis, Rachel Allister sat musing, a letter in her hand, her eyes looking out unseeingly, her heart and her thoughts far away in distant Asia. Below her, bathing tents were pitched upon the narrow belt of sands, where her boy and girl were digging with shouts and laughter. To her right, the gray Cobb curled out from the land, slim and sinuous, like a gorged snake; to her left rose the cliffs, white and yellow and red, crowned with the bright greens of the rolling downs. The summer-morning sunshine beat full upon the scene, lending a gay fresh colour to all things, dyeing the gently heaving sea to a brilliant blueness, and just touching the white sails of a solitary sailing ship loafing down to Portland. Men and women lolled upon the benches on the primitive esplanade; the waves were dotted with the figures of bathers; the sands were crowded with nurses and children; and here and there small knots of indolent Lyme Regis fisher folk stood about, waiting with the patience of a Micawber for the something to turn up whose arrival they did their feeble utmost to retard.

But Rachel saw none of these things. Instead, before her mind's eye there floated the picture of the station whence had come the letter she held between her fingers. Again she breathed the stifling thin air; again the merciless sun glare smote the earth and

parched it; again she saw the little bungalow clinging to the hillside, the dense foliage, the colourless sea spreading away to a horizon misty with heat, and a lonely man eating his heart out in solitude in the midst of all this luxuriant beauty.

She glanced at the letter in her hand, and her eye caught a jesting phrase. A smile formed slowly on her sad face, then died out quickly as she gave a tiny wince and heaved a sigh.

"I wish he wouldn't," she thought. "He can't feel like that: it doesn't ring true a bit. He puts it on to blind me, to hide what he is suffering, and yet it doesn't deceive me—it only hurts. I know what he must be going through, poor Martin; yet no one could guess it at all from his letters, and it makes him feel so much further away—so much further away."

She rested her chin upon her hand, and on the eyes, which still peered into the unknowable, there gathered the film of tears.

Rachel, with her children close at hand, still was weeping for her child—the one to her most precious, most sorely in need of her mothering—and refused to be comforted because he was not.

IN THE HEART OF KALAMANTAN

The good wife's sons come home again
With little into their hands,
But the lore of men that ha' dealt with men
In the new and naked lands;

But the faith of men that ha' brothered men
By more than easy breath,
And the eyes of men that ha' read wi' men
In the open books of death.

—KIPLING.

SEATED on the ground, his bowed back resting against the wall of the stockade, his up-drawn knees supporting his elbows, his upright palms flat, one against either cheek, he stared moodily at the sunset. His figure was thin and wasted; the colour of his skin was sallow and opaque; premature lines had furrowed themselves upon a face which should have been that of one in his first youth. Even now that the glory in the western sky furnished beauty enough to glut the sight of any man, his eyes were restless and shift. Every minute or so he recalled his gaze from the distant horizon and threw anxious, uneasy glances about him, as though he were threatened by some ever-present danger. It was the same feeling of insecurity that had caused him to seat himself with the only solid structure anywhere visible protecting his back from possible assault.

The little blockhouse, surrounded by its wooden palisade, above which the high-pitched palm-leaf roof rose skyward in a dust-coloured pyramid, stood in the centre of a wide, flat valley. On every side, for a distance of four or five miles, the ground stretched to the foothills in a series of low, sweeping undulations, the whole smothered completely in a waste of coarse, rank grass. The squalid Mûrut villages nestled in the hollows, and were so nearly concealed by the grass tufts on the higher ground that they did not serve to break the flatness of the plain or to relieve the aching monotony of that sun-parched expanse. Each of these villages consisted of a single long, lop-sided barrack, built of bamboos and thatched with palm fronds, and with an exit at either end. These erections were raised a few feet above the ground level on piles, and the interiors consisted of a number of narrow cubicles that formed the family abodes of the community, and opened on to a common veranda running the whole length of the building. The bachelors of the tribe lived and slept on the veranda, the use of which was common to all.

Fencing the valley with what looked like an endless chain without break or outlet, ranges of mountains rose abruptly from its edge, those on the north clustering about the feet of a giant peak some eleven thousand feet in height, those to the south, east, and west sloping upward to lesser summits of three thousand or four thousand feet above the level of the plain. Once, long ago, in the dim recesses of an unrecorded past, this valley had been a lake, hidden from the eyes of men in

the heart of many mountains. Now the waters had subsided, giving place to an unclean branch of the human family, whose members squatted like a foul parasitic growth on the rich alluvial soil; but to the solitary white man, the loneliness of the place could not have been more intense had the valley retained unaltered its prehistoric aspect.

That ring of tumbled hilltops, hemming him in on every side, were to him the walls of a prison. They had for him a terrible fascination—the fascination of fear. The journey to this place had cost him several days of heart-breaking toil—days spent in penetrating the forest belt on the coast, in scrambling up the mountain-sides by means of precipitous native paths, and in subsequently slipping down into the valley in which the local government had decided to station him. Even now, though the experience was some months old, the memory of that tramp was a nightmare that set all his limbs aching. He recalled the hours devoted to climbing, climbing, climbing up those apparently interminable paths; the agony of looking ahead and seeing the slim line of almost perpendicular track stretching heavenward in unbroken ascent; the cramp occasioned in his feet by walking for miles on the shelving hillsides or by struggling over smooth, round boulders in the beds of torrents; the vertigo that had turned him sick as he tight-rope along a ridge from which the ground fell away dizzily in sheer pitches on either hand; the frequent croppers which had shaken him from head to foot, covering him with bruises; the heat, the sweat, the toil, the insufferable sense of fatigue and exhaustion.

And all the time, and ever since, he had been haunted by the thought that, were he to fall sick, he would have to die where he was—that he could never hope to survive an attempt again to cross that cruel barrier of mountains. Daily, this idea had grown upon him as he brooded over it, fretting his nerves, working upon his imagination, filling him with a sickening fear, till at last the valley had become for him a dungeon, the mountains rows of inexorable warders shutting him off from his kind, from hope, from life and the chance of life.

He was that exceptional creature, a very sensitive and imaginative young Englishman. It so chanced that most of the boys whom Fate and Great Britain chuck headlong into the least desirable outposts of the Empire, there to teach savage folk the virtues which they instinctively dislike, and to wean them from some of the vices that they naturally approve, have certain qualities which stand them in good stead. They may not be brilliant men at their books; indeed, many of them may have been “ploughed” and plucked” until they are furrowed and bare. As a rule, however, they are endowed with an almost unshakable self-confidence; with a conviction of their racial superiority which enables them to rule men of a lesser breed with a calm strength, the force of which is more than Medic; with a fearlessness that seems to imply a complete absence of nerves; and above all, with a strong sense of justice, and innate love of fair play, and a sound common sense that are more than half the science of government. Men of this type go forth into the wild and barren

corners of the world, and live there, or die there, as the case may be, with an inspiring lightness of heart, few of them even realizing, it would seem, that their lot is in any sense harder than that of their fellows. Moreover, the best of them become so absorbed by the interest of their task that, for a space, all other created things sink in their estimation into utter insignificance. Boys who lead the lives of outcasts, alone and unfriended among a savage people, will speak to you with enthusiasm of the attractions of their impossible "District"; will compare most unfavourably with it the little steaming towns of the East, where white men strive to create the illusion that their days of exile have ended; and it is only those of us who have passed through a similar experience, perhaps, who can detect the broad sanity underlying this apparent mania.

But now and again it happens that those who select men for these billets forget that, though the average English lad has an inbred aptitude for this particular class of work, there are exceptions to this, as to most rules. Gervase Fornier, the solitary white man now seated on the ground gazing at the sunset, was one of these exceptions. His relatives were poor, and it was necessary that the boy should work for his living. He, however, had been signally unfortunate in his attempts to satisfy the examiners at Burlington House as to his intellectual fitness for any branch of the public service. He was by no means lacking in brains, and he possessed some literary and artistic tastes; but his acquirements were not of that solid order which commands the respect, and is rewarded by the marks, of the Civil Serv-

ice Examination Board. Perhaps he spent too much time, which should have been devoted to "cramming," in reading books not in the curriculum, and more still in writing little stories and essays, which his mother pronounced to be wonderful and quite as good as De Quincey, and which the editors, to whom they were submitted, declined to use with a surprising unanimity. At last old Mr. Fornier, who did not share his wife's admiration for their son, said roundly that he had wasted money enough upon Gervase's education, and the opportunity occurring about that time, shipped him off to Kalamantan, in the political service of which state his influence had secured the boy a nomination.

Gervase felt the picturesqueness of his exile acutely, and he wrote some wishy-washy verse upon the subject between the intervals of seasickness, deck dances, and P. & O. flirtations. From Singapore, an evil-smelling little steam tramp carried him into the Archipelago; and this and the sweltering tropical town, in which he began his service, speedily robbed the situation for him of its last shreds of romance. There was a good deal of exacting office work to be done, the Malay language to be studied, and a gang of short-tempered senior officers to be satisfied, who proved to be much more outspoken and even less amenable than the Civil Service Examiners themselves. Gervase suffered pangs of homesickness. His self-esteem sustained a rude shock when he made the discovery that, in the eyes of those about him, there was nothing in the least picturesque or unusual in the fact of his enforced banishment—that he was merely one of a pack of unconsidered youngsters who

were valued solely for the amount of work each of them was able to get through, without blunders, in a given time. He was desperately miserable and longed to resign his appointment; but his father, who distrusted the young man's perseverance, made him no allowance, and the pittance he was earning barely sufficed to cover his current expenses. It would take him years, he foresaw, to save enough money to pay the cost of a return passage to England, even if he could summon the courage necessary to enable him to face an interview with his irate parent. Long before the death of a brother officer led to Gervase being sent up-country to take charge of the district which is the heart of Kalamantan, he had learned to look upon the life to which he was doomed as at once prosaic, commonplace, dull, and ugly. It was not, however, until he had reached his station in the interior that the full measure of his misery had been made plain to him.

"Are you going to send young Fornier to succeed Bush, sir?" the Headquarters Resident had asked his chief.

"I am," said the latter grimly.

"He won't do much good there."

"So far as I know, there isn't much good to be done."

"To my thinking, sir, he's not the cut of youngster for an up-country station."

"He is not the cut of youngster for any station. In the interior, there is nothing to be done, and Fornier, if I know him, will do it."

The Resident laughed.

"All the same, I can't help fearing that it will prove a

failure, sir," he said. "I doubt whether the lad has the pluck or the stamina for such a lonely job."

The Chief stretched himself elaborately and spoke through a half-stifled yawn. The discussion was taking place at the end of a ten-hour day at his desk, and the heat would have been disturbing to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

"I am inclined to agree with you," he said. "But it is about the only chance I can see of making a man of the fellow—an off-chance, I admit, but it's fair to give it to him."

The Chief was a hard as well as a strong man. In the years that were done, he had himself gone through the searching ordeal of long solitary exile among folk of an alien race and had come through it triumphantly, with a great reputation for skill and nerve in the management of turbulent tribes. He was wont to speak lovingly of his curious experiences, and to compare the office-pent but comfort-laden present unfavourably with the joys and freedom of the rough, adventurous, peril-beset past. At that moment, he would have given much to be young again, and destined, like Gervase Fournier, for solitary duty in the heart of Kalamantan. He was of all men, therefore, the one most ill-calculated to appreciate the effects that exile would be likely to produce upon the sensitive, imaginative, timid temperament of the lad whose fate he was deciding.

From the beginning of his sojourn in the heart of Kalamantan, the horror of his surroundings had gripped Gervase mercilessly. It was not only the utter lone-

liness, which those ramparts of blue mountains emphasized, that numbed and paralysed him, not only the sense of his entire self-dependence cut off from all human aid which awed and cowed him, it was the appearance, the habits, the brutal savagery of the natives of the valley that filled him with disgust, with unconquerable aversion, with ungovernable fear. They were filthy Mûruts, one of the lowest and most debased races of our human stock. They ground their teeth to the gums; they plucked out their eyebrows and eyelashes, thus giving to their faces an air of deformity; and they parted their frowsy locks in the middle, after twisting their long hair into dirty chignons, so that every man among them appeared to belong to some infinitely degraded branch of the female sex. For the most part, they wore no clothing save a foul loin-clout; but occasionally they went abroad dressed in grotesque sleeveless, tightly fitting coats of plaited grass ornamented with incongruous tails, long like those of the Pied Piper, and cut after the fashion of the evening garments of masculine civilization.

They were lazy, improvident, and abominable in their habits. They converted their annual crop of rice into atrocious native liquor, wherewith they achieved a condition of chronic intoxication punctuated by periodical drunken orgies. In these, men, women, and children alike took part, for these drinking bouts had a deep religious significance and sanction. At such times, all the members of the tribe absorbed incredible quantities of the poisonous stuff, which they sucked up from the jars in which it was stored by the aid of long

bamboo tubes. With much drumming and song and noise the Mûruts, male and female, young and old, crowded round the jars, drinking till they could drink no more. The noise increased as they waxed merry, then quarrelsome, then riotous; it died down gradually as they became somnolent, and as each member of the tribe in turn fell prostrate, to lie about for hours, moaning and vomiting in the open shamelessness of coma. Then as one by one they recovered consciousness, each would crawl back to the liquor jars to drink and drink anew.

. For the greater part of every year, these people suffered from famine; for not only the rice, but the tapioca, and the jungle-roots with which they sought to replace their squandered crops, were turned into liquor, of which there was always a stock at hand even when the tribe had not tasted solid food for many hours.

These things filled young Fournier with horror and with disgust; but when the savage rhythm of the Mûrut drums throbbed and pulsed across the valley, blent with the tumult of their bestial uproar, they inspired in him also fear. Moreover, as he judged matters, there existed substantial justifications for his apprehension.

One day, shortly after his arrival in the valley, he had visited a neighbouring Mûrut village, and climbing up the ladder at one end of the building, had passed through the low doorway and had taken his seat on the floor of the long veranda, which was the common room of the tribe. A collection of huge earthenware jars—the only valuables of the Mûruts, and at that time their

sole currency—was ranged along the edge of the veranda, and the naked inhabitants of the place sprawled and squatted around in grotesque attitudes, without regard to the seemliness and courtesy that the Malayan peoples use. The interior of the long hut was stuffy, dark, and evil-smelling—redolent of the horrible odour of the Mûruts, mingled with that of the lean swine in the ill-kept sties beneath the building. Coming suddenly out of the blazing sun glare of the noontide into the gloom, some moments elapsed before Gervase could see anything distinctly; but presently, looking upward, his eyes rested upon certain objects the sight of which made his heart stand still. They were round in shape, blackened with soot, and they were festooned along the outer wall plate of the veranda, extending from one end of the hut to the other. At intervals, there were suspended between them great greasy bunches of the leaves which Malays call *duan sîlat*. Each of these objects had deep, cavernous eyes that glared at Gervase above set jaws, which grinned with a horrible, unchanging merriment. They were human skulls; and as he gazed at them, the whole long row of them seemed, to his morbid imagination, to fix their sightless eye sockets upon him in awful invitation, while those jaws, which had been clenched in the agony of a violent death, appeared to be laughing in derisive concert at the death which in his turn awaited him. Gervase almost fancied that he could hear the sound of that ghoulisn merriment—the mockery of that still chorus of the dead; that they recognized him as one

fated to belong to their company; that they triumphantly prophesied his doom.

Sick with horror and dismay, he leaped hurriedly to his feet, forced a path through the crowd of bewildered Mûruts till he regained the open air, and then stumbled back to his stockade. He was sweating at every pore.

And the memory haunted him. Involuntarily, he pictured to himself the manner of the unforeseen death which had robbed each of the owners of those grinning skulls of the life that had animated him. In his dreams, he was the witness of a hundred hideous and treacherous murders. Twenty times a day, the head-hunters, in fancy, were upon him. A stir caused by a lizard in the grass set his heart beating. Every chance noise made his pulses leap and left him faint and giddy. The drums and shouts of the drunken folk in the valley spoke now a sure message, and the very soul of him cowered as he heard. His Dyak policemen, whose minds ran a good deal on such things, told him blood-curdling tales with the light-hearted brutality of their kind—tales of their own head-hunting traditions, ere Râja Brooke, uncle and nephew, came to Sarawak and inexplicably put an end to that manly sport. They told stories, too, of the manner in which the Mûruts secured new trophies by stealing upon unarmed people engaged in sowing their crops, upon mothers tending their little ones, upon strayed children, decrepit old men, or upon warriors overcome by drink. Soon Gervase, still tortured by that restless imagination of his, began to fear the Dyaks as much as he feared the

Mûruts. They had the head-hunting tradition behind them, and they openly lamented the enforced substitution of swine for human victims. Might not the old passion for indiscriminate slaughter suddenly re-awake in them? Yet these men were his sole guard, his only protectors; he shared his stockade with them, slept within earshot of them, was utterly at their mercy.

If Gervase had known more, and if he had given a less free rein to his imagination, he would have been spared much mental agony. Most of the heads adorning the Mûrut huts in his valley were the trophies of almost prehistoric times. Though, now and again, if a peculiarly tempting opportunity offered, a head might still on occasion be taken, the practice had become obsolete, for the people stood in considerable awe of their white rulers, and were aware of their prejudices. Also, even the bloodstained records of the Kalamantan of an earlier date told of few European victims sacrificed to the savage custom. Drunk or sober, the Mûruts around him did not so much as dream of annexing the skull of their white district officer, while the Dyaks were as loyal and as good-hearted a set of little folk as a man need wish to be befriended by when in a tight place. If he could only have realized it, Gervase was almost as safe in the heart of Kalamantan as he would have been in a crowded London thoroughfare—in some respects even safer, for here he stood no chance of being obliterated by a taxicab driver with highly developed homicidal instincts. But the boy was alone, isolated, cut off from men of his own breed, and the intolerable monotony of his days and nights fretted his nerves to

excruciation, making him a more easy prey to morbid fears than he himself would have conceived to be possible six months earlier.

As Gervase sat now, his back protected from possible attack by the wall of his stockade, he gazed outward at the western barrier of mountains, behind which the sun had sunk from sight. Above them, the glow was firing the heavens with a blaze of wonderful colours—every shade of orange, red, and crimson, wide washes of pink, splashes of yellow, flecks of gorgeous tints for which men have no name—all attaining to the extraordinary intensity which is only to be seen in the Malayan Archipelago and in the lands which border the China Sea. Higher still in a broad expanse, pure and stainless, and here and there forming slim insets against the brighter hues, the sky showed an ethereal azure, emphasizing by contrast the surrounding glory. Against this riot of colour, the tumbled heaps of mountain stood forth prominently, incredibly near, and of a blue so deep, even, and flawless that they had the air of having been dyed in some giant's vat. At the foot of the range, and in the near foreground, the crude greens of grass and scrub were so vivid as to be almost dazzling; and from moment to moment, kaleidoscopic changes were wrought in the sky overhead.

Gervase, leaning slightly forward, drank in the beauty and the splendour of the sunset with a feverish eagerness that grudged every second of the transient spectacle. He was by nature wedded to the soft and lovely side of life—to music, art, comfort—to all the

concomitants of an advanced and fastidious civilization. His appreciation of beautiful things amounted to a passion, and here, in the heart of Kalamantan, nature daily fed his craving during the sunset hour. But 6 P.M.—in these lands the sun goes to bed with exemplary punctuality—had of late held for Gervase a solace more precious than all. From the door of the stockade a procession of slim posts staggered off to the sky-line in single file, leaning tipsily at all sorts of angles, as though they had been joining the Mûruts in one of their drinking bouts. They were crowned by white insulators, connected together by wire; and at six o'clock in the evening, the Morse hours being over, this newly constructed line put Gervase into telephonic communication with his nearest European neighbour, a district officer who had his station over the mountains some sixty miles further inland. The track between the two places was villainous, and climbed up the sides of hills as a fly climbs up a pane of glass, wherefore, the journey from the heart of Kalamantan to Bânat was reckoned a stiff six-days' tramp. Now, however, the wisdom of the ages had found a means of annihilating space, and every evening Gervase sought comfort and companionship by talking to his distant countryman, whose face he had never seen.

Hardly had the glow died down in the western sky than he dragged himself to his feet, and entering his bedroom, rang up the one station with which he was connected by telephone. At the station in the opposite direction, there was a native operator, who by day oc-

cupied a telegraph office that much resembled a hen-coop, and who quitted his job with a punctuality that rivalled that of the Malayan sun.

"Are you there, Burnaby?" Gervase asked.

A reply came back in Malay.

"Where is the *Túan*?" Gervase inquired in the vernacular.

"The *Túan* is not here," the native answered. "There is trouble in the upper country, and the *Túan* left this place at dawn to-day. The Mûruts of the interior are making war, village striving with village, each seeking the heads of its fellows, and the *Túan* hath gone forth to punish. O Mother of mine! Those unwise ones will be sick in their livers and the poorer by much mulcting ere ever the *Túan* comes home." And a chuckle gurgled along the wire. Burnaby was a man who ruled the more turbulent tribes of the far interior with blended sympathy and firmness, and his people thought all the world of him.

"When will the *Túan* return?" asked Gervase anxiously.

The disappointment at being balked of his nightly talk was keen; but the news of trouble was to Gervase even more disturbing. If the Mûruts had broken out there, why should they not do the like in his own valley? He did not realize that there are Mûruts and Mûruts; that the men of the far interior still try spasmodically to keep up precious and time-honoured customs which have been effectually stamped out in more accessible places; and that an outbreak among

them could not conceivably affect his own peaceable but intoxicated tribesmen.

"When will the *Tûan* return?" repeated the voice. "Allah and the *Tûan* alone know. When *Tûan Bambi* sallies forth to speak with evil folk and to teach them docility, he is wont to be absent until the task be accomplished. It may be days or weeks or more. Until the villages sit down and bow their heads, paying heavy fines, *Tûan Bambi* will not return. My liver is moved with pity when I think of those so foolish people." And the voice laughed again.

Gervase racked his brains for something more to say. He was loth to sever his connection with the only companionship within his grasp. The voice through the telephone afforded him, in some illogical fashion, a sense of protection. It made his isolation less complete. For some minutes, therefore, he continued to ask a string of more or less pointless questions, to which he received wearied answers from the voice; but at last the latter lost patience, and asking to be excused that it might depart to eat rice, abruptly ceased the conversation.

With a heavy heart, Gervase turned away and sat down at a rickety table upon which his unappetizing meal was spread. Monotonous food, abominably badly cooked, is one of the delights of a distant up-country station in Kalamantan. No self-respecting scullion can be induced to take up his abode in such a place, and the result is much discomfort and more than a man's fair share of indigestion. The meal over, Gervase smoked a cheap cigar on his veranda, reading

for the hundredth time one of his few books—a dearth of literature and an occasional tobacco famine are also to be counted among the exile's crosses—and then went to bed. But, as was now his wont, he slept ill. All through the night, waking and sleeping, his imagination played him countless tricks. He dreamed of horrors and woke with a start, sweating and panting, to lie in open-eyed wretchedness, listening with wildly beating heart to every chance sound within and without the stockade. The drums in the valley and the drunken yells of the Múrut's resounded continuously until a late hour. They seemed more uproarious, more menacing than usual, and he wondered whether the natives were concocting plans to follow the example set by their fellows in Burnaby's district. The stealthy footfall of someone moving about the stockade caused him to sit up, with his revolver grasped in his hand; and toward dawn the very stillness of the night, given over wholly to bird and insect, filled him with unreasoning apprehensions.

Before the day broke, he fell finally into a heavy sleep, from which he awoke oppressed by a vague consciousness that some misfortune had befallen him. For a few moments, he lay groping in his mind for the cause of this new weight upon his spirits. Then, with a pang, he remembered that he was cut off from all communication with Burnaby; that there was trouble yonder over the mountains; and that his hitherto more or less indefinite fears were beginning to assume a concrete form. But it was the absence of Burnaby from Bánat that put the crown upon his misery. He had

learned of late to lean upon this man whom he had never seen, who was known to him only as a voice made unmusical by the twang and echo of the wire. At times he had almost ceased to remember the distance which separated him from Burnaby, so close had become their comradeship; though he had grown accustomed to talk of his fears, weaknesses, and sufferings to this invisible friend with a frankness that he could never have used to one into whose eyes he was looking while he unburdened himself of his humiliating confessions. And Burnaby had been very good to him—had never derided him or his troubles—had sought a hundred means to encourage and reassure him. He had not been altogether successful in this, for his own calm self-confidence and pluck made it difficult for him to appreciate the state of Gervase's mind, the frayed condition of his nerves, or the measure of his distress. None the less, that voice speaking to him out of the void had been young Fournier's salvation; had saved him from madness, he verily believed—perhaps from worse; and now that of a sudden it was withdrawn, Gervase's sense of loss and of desolation was overwhelming.

He never knew clearly how he fought through the week that followed. The harvest had just been reaped, and it had been a fat one; wherefore the Mûruts of the valley enjoyed themselves excessively after their fashion. That is to say, the villages feasted one another with vociferous cordiality by day and by night. The hospitable creatures set before their guests meat that had been kept in the hollow of a bamboo until it had liquefied, and urging them to drink, pressed the bam-

boo tubes deep into the dregs at the bottom of the liquor jars, where the most intoxicating sediments are said to lurk. With shouts and laughter, babies were dragged from their mothers' breasts and were given the drinking tubes to suck instead; while men and women lay about the floors in every stage of drunkenness, from the ecstatic to the emetic. This meant, of course, that the valley was turned for the time into a hideous pandemonium; that the shouts and yells of the intoxicated savages raised an almost incessant tumult; and that the restless throbbing of their drums, which seemed ever to incite the people to fresh excesses, was never still.

The noise was an unbearable irritation to Gervase's jangled nerves. Some of his Dyaks sneaked off to the villages and returned to the stockade gloriously inconsequent and merrily pugnacious. This made Gervase more uneasy than ever. He only knew Malay, but he now got it into his head that his Dyaks were plotting against him, and with this *idée fixe* in his mind, he presently persuaded himself that their chatter—which was carried on among themselves, of course, in their own dialect—contained words and phrases of a sinister import, the meaning of which he believed that he now and again could catch. As the days passed, this suspicion became more and more acute, though it was, of course, purely imaginary; and he pondered over his troubles with a melancholy reiteration that almost threatened his sanity. More than once during this time he was on the verge of abandoning the hopeless struggle, and of making tracks for the coast and safety;

but there was something in him that withheld him from taking a step which he knew would mean shame and disgrace. He was firmly convinced of the actuality of the danger in which he believed himself to stand, but he despaired of making others see the full cumulative effect of the proofs which to him were so conclusive. Also, he knew what his own verdict would have been, six months earlier, if he had heard that one of his brother officers had been guilty of such cowardly behaviour; and though he now believed that that judgment would have been unjust, the shreds of self-respect that the heart of Kalamantan had left him sufficed to nail him to his post. Moreover, all unreasoningly, he told himself that everything might yet be well if only Burnaby would return to Bânat.

Daily at sundown he went to the telephone and asked for news of his friend; but always the same voice answered his inquiries in Malay. He learned to hate the sound of that voice, to loathe the chuckling laugh with which it mocked his disappointment; and every evening, with a groan, he rang off the telephone and resigned himself to yet another four-and-twenty hours of gnawing anxiety and morbid imaginings.

What if Burnaby should never return? The question came to him with persecuting insistence. It had no answer. Only a blank—an impenetrable gloom of darkest night—lay beyond; and from out of it the awful spectre of madness grinned at him with terrible foreknowledge of the future, just as something else had leered at him. . . . What was it? . . . Ah, he knew! Those appalling objects that had looked

down upon him with such triumphant mockery from the wall plate of the Mûrut hut.

The telephone bell rang out sharply, breaking on the silence of the sleeping stockade. It was ten o'clock at night, and the Dyak policemen were slumbering heavily. From the valley the yells and the pulsing of the drums still sounded, and Gervase Fournier was on his bed under his mosquito net. Nevertheless, he was across the floor and at the mouth of the telephone before the tinkling of the bell had ceased, and his voice shook with excitement as he called down the wire:

"Is that you, Burnaby?"

And when the answer came in the affirmative, "Thank God!" he ejaculated. It was a prayer of thanksgiving, spontaneous and from the heart, but it sounded like a sob.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Burnaby's voice. It sounded strangely thin and faint. Perhaps the batteries needed recharging.

"Oh, I've had an awful time, Burnaby," Gervase replied. "The Mûruts are on the drink from one end of the valley to the other, and the place fairly reeks with the stink of their filthy food and the fumes of their beastly liquor. I feel sure a row is brewing; and, Burnaby, the Dyaks are drinking, too. I don't trust them a yard, and I don't know what to do with them."

"Knock their heads together," suggested the voice.

"But, really, what do you think I ought to do?"

"I shouldn't fuss about it, if I were you. Give them a good telling-off when they become sober, and a bit of

pack drill to keep 'em so. But we'll talk about it all to-morrow. I'm too dog-tired to-night. So long. Keep your tail up."

Next evening, when the Morse hours were over, the conversation was resumed.

"Tell me about your own doings," said Gervase, when he had unburdened himself of the worst of his own besetting troubles and had received both advice and encouragement.

"Well, I got word that there was trouble in the interior, about twenty miles from here; so I started off at a moment's notice with a dozen of my fellows—Dyaks, you know—and a few Mûruts for guides and carriers. We had a tremendous tramp of it, all up hill and down dale—villainous country to march through, and quite impossible to fight in, if these jungle-folk knew their business—which they don't. I got to one village and found all the wall plates hung with fresh bunches of *duan sîlat*, and a rotting skull, boiled to a rag, being seasoned at the top of a split pole, in a kind of basket they call a *sěráwak*. All the villagers were drunk with 'new wine that taketh away the heart,' like those chaps in the Bible, and I collared the lot of them. They pointed out the popular hero who had taken the head—it belonged to a stray female whom he had caught while she was bathing—so I took him along with me, and fined the villagers as many jars as they could carry. I saw them loaded up, and sent them back to Bânat to lodge them in my house here against my return. I sent one of my Dyaks with them to see fair, and they went like lambs."

There was a strange weakness and excitability in the tones of Burnaby's voice which struck Gervase.

"Can you hear me distinctly?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Your voice sounds so faint."

"Does it?"

"Do you think that the batteries are getting exhausted?"

"Perhaps; but if so, the telegraph operator will see to it in the morning. You can hear me well enough to understand, can't you?"

"Yes. Go on with your story. It's wonderful to me the way you manage these savages."

"There isn't such a thing as a savage in the world," said the voice sententiously. "It is merely a question of diversity of prejudices, and a divergence, more or less material, in the point of view. If you could see things with a Mûrut's eyes, you would understand that a life is a life, and that, therefore, a head is a head, and that the sex or the size of the owner doesn't matter a hang, provided it is animated by the one and possessed of the other. Our dislike of the practice of killing women and children is a prejudice of quite recent growth, comparatively speaking, and our disapproval of alcoholism is more modern still. Why, it wasn't even shared by our great-grandfathers! Besides, if your life was bounded by a circle with a ten-mile radius drawn in the heart of Kalamantan, with no ambition, no prospects, and no moral sense—which itself is a thing of recent growth as anthropologists reckon time—you would very likely take to drink yourself. Lots of better men

than you or I have done so before now. As for the putrid meat you think so disgusting, that, after all, is only a question of degree and of personal taste. Don't we white men eat high game and venison? Don't we devour cheese that sits up and joins in the conversation? A really ripe Gorgonzola would probably sicken a Mûrut. The local natives are not cleanly, I admit, but neither were our ancestors. No self-respecting person ever took a tub, I fancy—not as a regular thing—until about the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Look into the matter, and you will find that we haven't such a great pull over the Mûruts, when all is said and done. The fact is that human beings are just a pack of savages together, if you must keep the word, and that we only succeed in transmuting, never in really eradicating, our primordial instincts."

"What a tirade," said Gervase. "But, all the same, I prefer our type of savagery to that of the Mûrut. Tell me more about your doings."

"There's isn't much to tell. Word that I was on the path had reached the next village in advance, and I had a little trouble there. They had three newly taken heads seasoning in the *sěráwaks*, and a *bângun* was in progress—specially arranged, I suspect, to show me that they were bent upon reviving the good old days in style."

"What in the wide world is a *bângun*?" asked Gervase.

"It is one of the cheerful practices in which the wilder Mûruts are always trying to indulge. It used, of

course, to be universal among them, but it is getting rare nowadays. I try to be broad-minded in such matters, but I confess I disapprove of a *bângun*, and all the people in the district know that it is the one thing that riles me past bearing."

"But what is it?"

"It is a devil dance of a peculiar kind which combines sport with utility, and is inspired by the purest motives of religion and natural affection. It has the advantage of providing fun that is quite safe, such as the Mûruts love; and it is useful because it establishes a sort of penny-post between this world and the next. The letters transmitted are never answered, of course; but that, after all, is the fate of most of one's correspondence with the living, and you can't expect the dead, who doubtless have their own affairs to look after, to bother about messages from us."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"I'm talking about a *bângun*. The Mûruts get hold of some old or decrepit person, generally a cripple or an aged hag, and hang the wretched creature up in a cage on the veranda of one of their huts, and poke and prod it to death with knives. They try to keep the poor brute alive as long as possible, but as everybody present is gloriously drunk, and as men, women, and children are all competing to get in as many pricks and stabs as may be, the victim of a *bângun* is wont to be used up rather quickly. Every time they jab it, the assailant cries out: 'Give my compliments to my father, or aunt, or sister or cousin, as the case may be, when

you join the other shades on the summit of Kina-Balu, and this wound which I inflict is the token from me that you shall bear to them.'

"You know that the Mûruts believe that when they die they go to the peaks of the great mountain, and I expect it's true. Even Satan would find it hard to put up with their notions of cleanliness and order; and no matter how many houses there may be in heaven, I can't myself see one of them being placed at their disposal.

"Well, anyway, when I got to Chěrchâdu—the village I was telling you of—they were having the very deuce of a *bângun*, the victim being a crippled old witch, bent double by years and deformity, and bleeding in fifty places. I rushed the place and saved the old thing; but the Mûruts were pot-valiant, and we had to kill a few of them before we could get the creature away. She showed no particular enthusiasm at her deliverance, but sat huddled in a corner, chattering and grimacing at us like a sick monkey. I fancy the *bângun* had over-excited her, and she wasn't sure whether she had already got to Kina-Balu, or whether she was still in the land of the living. However, I am glad we saved her, and now that I have patched her up, I think the old soul is going to live, while a good few of the men of the village will now be able to deliver their messages to their dead relatives in person, which will have a desirable moral effect in the district."

Gervase sat listening, aghast at what he heard, and the passionless intonation of the voice, emphasized by its weak, far-away sound, added to the intensity of his

horror. Already, in imagination, Gervase pictured himself being *bângun'd* by his Mûrut neighbours.

"What a terrible experience!" he exclaimed. "Were any of your people hurt?"

"One killed and two or three of us wounded. I got a prod with a spear myself—nothing to write home about, but it has put my temperature up a bit—a touch of fever, you know—so I don't think I'll talk much more to-night. So long."

Next evening the conversation between these two men, who had never looked upon one another's faces and yet were friends, each having caught more than a passing glimpse of the other's soul, began again at the usual hour.

"How is your wound to-night?" asked Gervase.

"Oh, it's a bit painful and that sort of thing," answered Burnaby. "But it's nothing much, really. I haven't even reported myself sick."

Gervase heaved a sigh of relief. During the last few hours he had been torturing himself with the fear that Burnaby might be invalided to the coast, in which case he, Gervase, would again be subjected to the ordeal of that soul-searching solitude which had well nigh proved too much for his endurance during his friend's short absence in the interior. He could not stifle an exclamation of thankfulness, which the wire faithfully repeated to the white man sixty miles away.

"Which are you thanking God for, young 'un? The slightness of my wound, or my failure to report it?" And the voice laughed rather hysterically.

“Oh, Burnaby, what a cur I am!” cried Gervase with bitter self-reproach. He had formed the habit of speaking with an extraordinary absence of restraint to this invisible friend. “I’m a self-centred, cowardly rotter. There are you, all alone, wounded and in pain—and bad pain, I am afraid—without any one to help or look after you—and here am I thinking of nothing but my dread of losing touch with you.”

For a moment he had a passing thought of volunteering to tramp across to Bânat in order to tend Burnaby in his illness. A few months earlier, he might have made the suggestion, but now his nerves had been so shaken by his perpetual apprehensions, that he dared not attempt an enterprise which he regarded as more than perilous. The way led through wild Mûrut country such as he had never yet visited—country that Burnaby could traverse in safety; but then Burnaby’s influence, he told himself, was a thing apart. It took but a second for these thoughts to jostle one another in his mind, but before he had arrived at a final resolution Burnaby spoke again.

“Steady. Don’t call yourself hard names, and don’t fret about me. I’m all right. But why in the world don’t you chuck it? You ain’t cut out for this sort of work, and you are only knocking yourself to pieces trying to stick it out.”

“I wish I could chuck it, but I can’t. I couldn’t even pay my passage home, for one thing, and my governor certainly wouldn’t help me. You see, my people are pretty badly off, and I’m self-supporting as long as I am in the Service out here. Besides . . .

Well, you've been most awfully good to me. You have seemed to understand, and you have never laughed at me about it; but nobody else would be like that. They would point the finger of scorn at me for ever after. In a way they would be right, too, I suppose; and I couldn't face the disgrace unless the misery of the life here had driven me quite off my head, and it won't do that as long as you are still at Bânat. If you had to go—well, God only knows what would happen to me then."

"Well, I'm not going, anyhow. Haven't I told you that I haven't even reported myself sick?"

"Yes. . . . But, Burnaby," said Gervase falteringly, "I hope—I hope you'll go—if you think you ought to. I trust you won't let any—any consideration for me cause you to run any risk—don't you know?"

Even to his own ears, the halting words rang false, and he cursed himself with that *mécontentement de soi-même qui est le pire des angoisses*. The thin, quavering laugh, so unlike any sound that usually came from Burnaby's lips, dribbled along the wire.

"Don't worry, Gervase. I won't leave you in the lurch," said the voice.

Then, Fornier, taking his courage in both hands, made the supreme effort of his life.

"Let me come across to you, Burnaby. I dare say I could get through——"

But the other interrupted him.

"Not for a thousand pounds," he said briskly. "You are a young brick to suggest it, but it isn't necessary. Now, tell me how you have been getting along. I would rather listen than talk this evening. Is the

heart of Kalamantan giving you the jim-jams as badly as ever?"

Gervase was still shaky from the intensity of the pressure he had put upon himself in order to screw his resolution up to the point of offering to go across to Bânat, and with the relief, no less intense, with which he had heard his proposal declined. The latter emotion, strong though involuntary, filled him with shame and with deep self-digust.

"Oh, Burnaby, it has been awful," he now replied. "Don't despise me more than you can help, but—those mountains, shutting me in on every side, take the heart out of me. They cut me off from the living as though I were buried alive. I'm damned before my time. All day long, I look at them, ringing me around so pitilessly; at the blinding expanse of flat, green plain, with the heat haze dancing above it; at the little spurs of hill running out into it, as though nature itself were poking fingers of derision at me. It makes me as desperate as a caged and tortured animal. Don't you feel it, too?"

"Can't say I do. I take the world as God made it and the Mûruts as the devil made *them*. But I think I can understand, and I wish to heaven I could help you. Can't you pull yourself together and buck up a bit? Your trouble is all imagination and nerves, if you could only bring yourself to believe it."

"That is what the Christian Scientists say of pain; but the pain is there none the less. The thing is so real to me that half the time I have to hold on to myself with both hands to save myself from screaming aloud."

Far into the night, Gervase Fournier sat pouring out his thoughts and feelings to his friend, and words of encouragement, sympathy, and advice filtered through to him along the wire from Burnaby. It was an unspeakable relief to the overwrought youngster to be able to put his trouble into words. The mental agony that was his filled every cranny of his being. His morbid forebodings pursued him sleeping and waking, and they were fast winning upon him a grip like that of a monomania. He no longer reasoned or argued with himself about them. They were to him hard facts, unquestioned, insistent, overwhelming. An outlet of some sort was a necessity, and to the impersonal personality at the other end of the telephone he could pour himself out, as a man might commune with the higher elements of his own soul. Yet, as he talked, his fears and his excitement shook him with an irresistible tremor.

Sixty miles off at Bânat, a gaunt man, of some two or three and thirty years of age, lay stretched out on a long rattan chair, with the telephone instrument fixed convenient to his reach. His face, adorned with a week's growth of wiry beard, was of a livid pallor, the effect of which was heightened by a patch of hectic flush on either cheek. A bamboo spear, which had been thrust through his thigh, had left a festering wound, that had been clumsily swathed in stained bandages. He was racked with fever, which parched his skin, making it rough to the touch and fiery hot. His eyes shone with an unnatural brightness. His injured leg constrained him to lie as still as he could,

but he was harassed by an unconquerable restlessness. It was the fourth day since that upon which he had received his wound; he had lost much blood; and he was spent and weak; but sleep held aloof, and he was possessed by a vague, inconsequent notion that his first duty was toward young Fornier—the lad whom he only partially understood, who was known only to him as a complaining voice—Gervase Fornier, whom he had begun by despising, but had ended by loving in a sort of paternal, protecting fashion which, even to himself, he owned to be inexplicable. His feeling for the boy was of the kind whereby, not infrequently, a strong, self-sufficing nature is animated when brought into contact with one which is weaker and which clings to it for support. Gervase made to him an appeal that was almost feminine in the quality of the claims it had established upon his essentially male temperament. Genuine pity for him, a sort of lenient contempt that held kindness, not scorn, and a strongly protective instinct were blended in his heart with a tenderness bred of affection. In the beginning, he had been interested by a personality which seemed the antithesis of his own. Later, he had been attracted by it; and he had ended by feeling that he was in a measure responsible for young Fornier, though the latter was bound to him by no recognizable tie. He had even gone to the length of secretly making excuses for the lad, and had sought to convince himself that there was grit at the bottom of his character if it could only be developed. In this connection, he had welcomed Gervase's confession that it was dread of disgrace that held him to his post. Still more had he been

pleased by Fournier's faltering suggestion that he should quit Bânat if his health made such action advisable; and the boy's subsequent offer to come through to him had struck Burnaby as, in all the circumstances, a piece of sheer heroism—which it was. In his weak state, reduced by fever and by loss of blood, he had felt the tears rise to his eyes when he had received this proof of the other's devotion; but he had hastened to decline the proposal, and he had there and then registered a silent vow that, God helping him, he would hang on at Bânat, for Gervase's sake, as long as he possibly could. His station had water communication with the coast by means of a big river, down which it would have been easy for Burnaby to make his way by boat to the abode of doctors and the dwellings of civilized man, at the cost of a few days' journeying. On the other hand, to punt a boat up to Bânat in the teeth of the strong current was a task that would occupy the best part of three weeks. In ordinary circumstances, Burnaby would have gone downstream, as a matter of course, in order to get his wound properly tended; but now he thrust the idea aside, since its adoption would entail the abandonment of young Fournier.

Tom Burnaby was a man whom Fate had exiled at a very early age to a godforsaken cranny of the great East, and had doomed him to live there for near a dozen years aloof from folk of his own race and colour. Once, during that interval, he had passed twelve months on furlough in England; but he had been recovering from dysentery at the time, and had spent his leave in bed and in seclusion, patching himself up for a further tour of

service in the tropics. Like most men who are endowed with big natures, Burnaby had great potentialities of affection, but his life had hitherto been of a kind that precluded them from finding an outlet. They had, as it were, been pent up within him; but now, of a sudden, the presence of a weaker spirit had let loose the flood gates, and the "love that is wonderful, passing the love of women," had awakened in his heart, binding him to Gervase with a sentiment so strong that self-interest and acute physical suffering were alike ignored.

During the evenings that followed, the telephone bore words of comfort and sympathy to Gervase, who hung upon them more eagerly than ever before. Till now, there had always seemed to be a certain element of hardness in Burnaby's intercourse with the youngster. There had even been moments when Fournier had fancied that the patience of his friend was wearing thin; but now a softer, gentler quality seemed to have entered into their unusual relationship. Burnaby abandoned the rough, almost harsh tone that Gervase had learned to regard as characteristic of him, and which the latter had adopted, perhaps, as that best calculated to stiffen the boy's feebleness. Also, in this new and chastened mood, Burnaby spoke of himself and of his own feelings and emotions as he had never done before. In words that rang true, though they were curt and shy, he told Gervase one night the story of the only romance that had ever come into his loveless life—of the boy-and-girl engagement, which had never been able to win parental

approval, that had made the first days of his exile so bitter to him. Most young Englishmen who are set to do the Empire's work at lonely outposts in the tropics cherish somewhere at the back of their hearts the memory of a girl at home. Often enough, it becomes blurred by time; all too frequently it lies buried deep beneath the sods that years of careless bachelor life have dumped upon its grave; but that memory, or the ghost of it, continues to haunt the mind, and rises ever and anon to chide and beckon. Few men speak of these half-sacred things, though most of us, by introspection and inference, suspect that our comrades are similarly haunted; and men like Burnaby—men with strong, deep natures—are wont to be more reticent than any. Now, however, weakened by fever and loss of blood, the long habit of silence and self-repression dropped from him; and Gervase Fournier, whose vivid imagination enabled him to construct such clear-cut pictures from his friend's gruff phrases, sat at the other end of the telephone and listened with eager sympathy to the fragmentary story that came to him whispered over miles and miles of forest, mountain, and plain.

These confidences, so intimate, so deeply felt, drew the two men together, making each of them conscious of a closer bond and of a stronger affection for one another than either had been aware of before. For his part, Gervase was filled with a sort of wonder at the courage and endurance of this man who, during the months that he had known him, had always been the same light-hearted, brave, confidence-creating friend, never dispirited, never cast down by failure, or driven

half-mad by exile and by solitude, and who yet had such a tender side to his character. Gervase had always thought that Burnaby was "as hard as nails," and none the less had leaned on him and had loved him. He loved him even better now. What a man he was! What a born leader! One whom other men would follow living, would die for, perhaps, if thereby they might save him from death! The shallowness, the futility of his own character smote him anew by reason of the contrast. There were moments during these days when Gervase's hatred of himself filled him with such shame that he set his teeth and swore to fight against his weakness and to conquer the fears that persecuted him.

There came a day when Gervase went about his stockade with a new air of confidence, gave his orders sharply and imperatively, and was at once surprised and delighted to see that they were obeyed at the jump. He was trying to be more like Burnaby.

The next evening, the telephone rang him up as usual.

"I'm not going to talk much to-night," said Burnaby.

"You aren't any worse, are you?" asked Fornier anxiously.

"No. But I'm feeling infernally shuck."

"Are you well enough to play? You haven't touched the accordion since you came back to Bânat."

"I'll try."

Presently, the nasal notes of the instrument came twanging over the wire, and Gervase sat listening with a full heart. It was a really good accordion, as such things go, but they are not producers of very sweet

music at best, and you or I would not willingly have listened to the discordant sounds which this one made for many consecutive minutes. Up here in the heart of Kalamantan, however, it was different. Even an accordion can speak its message of melody to ears that have not hearkened to European music for many months; and as the old tunes—"the tunes that make you choke and blow your nose"—came sobbing along the wire, they conjured up for Gervase the memory of many careless happy days and pictures of summertime in England, with a vividness like that produced by the half-faded scent we light upon by chance.

It had a weird effect, this music from afar, speaking to the lonely youngster in the wilderness which was his prison house; but the weirdness would have been intensified could any mortal eye have beheld the musician.

Burnaby was stretched upon a rude bed which had been dragged to the mouth of the telephone. He was clothed in a loose sleeping jacket and a wide native waistcloth that covered him from the waist to the ankles. In the few days which had elapsed since his return to Bânat, his whole face seemed to have collapsed and to have fallen inward. There were great hollows about his temples, deep caverns beneath his prominent cheek bones. His eyes, blazing with fever, looked out of sockets that were like wells. His forehead and brows were bossy with bony excrescences; his chin was covered by a stubble of unshaven beard; his arms and legs were wasted till they were mere sticks, brittle and sharp, with unsightly protuberances where the joints bulged beneath the taut skin. The hands that held the ac-

cordion were bunches of skin and bone, bound together by tangled veins and sinews.

His eyes were terrible. They were wildly restless, their gaze wandering hither and thither about the squalid room as though in search of some means of escape from present suffering. They glared from out their deeply sunken pits like savage creatures, caged and fierce.

He played with palpable effort, panting noisily with the exertion; but still the old tunes wailed and sobbed, bearing their sentimental messages to Gervase sixty miles away. Suddenly, in the middle of a bar, the instrument fell from Burnaby's hands, slipping on to the floor with a discordant clash.

"I won't play any more to-night—I'm—not up to it," he panted down the telephone. "Keep your—pecker up—young 'un.—Good—night. And—God bless you."

The last words came with a rush, and then the telephone was disconnected.

"I've stayed with the poor little beggar as long as I could; but it looks as though I should have to leave him, after all. May God help him!" was Burnaby's last connected thought, before exhaustion robbed him of consciousness.

A couple of hours later, the telephone bell on the instrument in Gervase's bedroom shrilled through the stillness. He leaped out of bed, disentangling himself from his mosquito net, and ran to it at once.

"Is that you, Burnaby?" he cried.

An answer came back in Malay, the speaker's voice tripping and stumbling in his excitement and perturbation.

"*Ya Allah, Tûan,*" it exclaimed. "The order of the Most High hath come to our *Tûan*. He died a moment since."

Gervase Fornier staggered back against the wall. He was stunned as by a blow dealt him between the eyes. Burnaby dead! He could not believe it. Why, he had spoken of his wound as a "prod with a spear"—he hadn't even reported himself sick! Barely two hours ago, he had been speaking to Gervase, playing the accordion. Why had he concealed the gravity of his hurt? And at that question, the truth, in a flash, was made plain to Gervase Fornier, shaking him with a great tremor and leaving him aghast with horror and dismay. Burnaby had done this thing—had sacrificed his life—a life of such value, of such nobility—in order to save his friend from solitude, to rescue him from the hauntings of his paltry fears. The splendour of this act of self-denial, and of the strength and endurance, both mental and physical, that had made its performance possible, filled Gervase with an admiration so intense that, for a moment, it fairly dazzled him. Then his mind cleared. He saw the whole situation revealed with a merciless severity, and instantly there came to him a passionate self-loathing, such as had visited him more than once of late, but now was more fierce, more overpowering than ever before. This tremendous sacrifice had been made for him—for *him*! For a creature so worthless, so abject, so weak that Burnaby had feared to leave

him alone lest he should lose his reason, and had thrown his precious life away in a desperate attempt to save him. A realization of this fact made him feel physically sick—set him longing to blot himself out of existence, as a thing of infinite defilement, whose very presence besmirched the surface of a comparatively clean earth. But, more than all, Gervase was torn by a savage desire, that seemed to well upward from the very depths of his being, bidding him to do something—anything—no matter how reckless its character, if only he might thereby atone in a measure for what he felt to be a crime of his committing.

In the past, he had often pictured what would be his sensations were Burnaby to die or to leave him; but his fancy had never painted anything resembling the actuality. His fears and thoughts had then been wholly selfish: but now personal anxieties and pre-occupations were forgotten, or rather had sunk into complete insignificance. What cared he for the miseries of isolation and solitude? What mattered the risk of death at the hands of squalid savages, now that Tom Burnaby had died for him, and dying had brought home to him the full measure of the weakness of his character and of his lack of courage? How could he any longer dread death, or desire to prolong his life, now that he had been compelled to look upon his own soul in all its sorry nakedness, and had learned to fear to live on and on with the memory of that experience clinging to him? And Burnaby—Tom Burnaby! What a friend he had been, what a man, what a tower of strength! Sudden inconsequent recollections of chance

words uttered by the dead man, of his kindness, of his patience, of his recent gentleness, came to his mind, setting the apple lumping in his throat and the hard tears gathering in his eyes.

Only an instant of time was needed for all these crowding emotions to rush in tumult through his brain; and a minute or two later he became aware that the voice of the native at the other end of the telephone was still speaking.

"What is that? Say it again," said Gervase peremptorily.

"We folk be sore afraid," answered the Voice. "The wild Mûruts of the interior will surely get word of the death of our *Tûan*, and since they feared him greatly and set great store by the magic lore of which he was notoriously possessed, they will, it is certain, try to secure his skull and other portions of his body to serve them as talismans, and wherefrom to fashion their so unclean and barbarous medicines. We folk be few, and these accursed Mûruts are many; moreover, we no longer have our *Tûan* with us to hold these wretches in awe. The villages up country have very sick livers, the matter of the recent multings and punishments being as an open sore between us, now that our *Tûan* hath gone home to the mercy of Allah, and without doubt, *Tûan*, they will raid us. Hath the *Tûan* any order?"

Then it was that Gervase Fournier's new-born manhood arose and spoke. His words rang down the wire firm and imperative; and the Malay, recognizing therein the tone of the master, listened submissively,

and never so much as dreamed of argument or disobedience.

"Bury the body of the *Túan* within the walls of the stockade," ordered Gervase. "And thereafter you and your fellows must keep watch and ward over the grave, both by day and by night, until I come. I start at dawn, and within six days, at the most, I shall be with you. Do you hear?"

"Yes, *Túan*."

"Aye, and hearken once again. I'll have the skin off the back of any man who sleeps at his post, and the lives of one and all if aught of ill befalleth the body of *Túan Bambi* ere I arrive at *Bânat*. Do you hear?"

"Yes, *Túan*."

"It is well. Now go you and do my bidding, and fail not therein lest, at my coming, grievous calamities assail you all."

And Gervase restored the receiver of the telephone to its clutch.

The resolution to cross the dangerous zone of wild *Mûrut* country had been taken in an instant, but thereafter Gervase never faltered. His belief in the perils besetting such a journey was as firm as of old, but of a sudden the whole attitude of his mind toward such matters as personal risk had undergone a change. What cared he now if his end came to him in some violent and ugly guise, so be it that he died in an attempt to serve the man who had been faithful to him even unto death?

At dawn, accompanied by ten of his *Dyaks*, Gervase *Fornier* left his stockade and set out upon his journey through the chill of the morning mists that swaddled

the valley as in a quilt of cotton wool. His way led eastward, into the very eye of the sunrise, and presently the barrier of mountains, their crests crowned by a pale glory of faint pinks and yellows, became visible, and then stood prominently forth, like a host of mighty enemies calmly awaiting his assault. All day he plodded doggedly onward across the glaring plain, the sun beating down upon him pitilessly from out a cloudless sky, scorching his bare arms, his neck, his face, blistering his back even through his flannel shirt, and making his eyes swim and ache. At sundown he camped at the foot of the mountains in a Mûrut village, and there slept the sleep of exhaustion—which is sounder than the slumber of the just—in spite of the rows of soot-blackened skulls, winking at him in the dim torchlight, from the beams overhead. Those hideous trophies bore to him their threatening message no less surely than of old, but it was a message that had lost its meaning. Since Burnaby had died for him, life was a more awful thing than death itself.

The next day he began the ascent of the mountains. The track ran through the foothills, climbing, as is the habit of native-made paths, to the top of every summit, thence to drop sheer in a headlong pitch to the hot, moist valley below. It was like crawling up and down a badly graded switchback unaided by momentum in the descents or by gathered impetus when ascending. In many places, the grass underfoot was sun-dried till its surface was as slippery as ice; in others, rude steps, which had been hacked in the hillside to aid the climber, had been scoured away by the rains of the last wet sea-

son, and Gervase was confronted by blank slopes of landslip up which he had to fight every inch of his way, now sliding backward half-a-dozen paces, his shoes filled with gravel, now clamping himself to the sheer surface while he sought to regain his sobbing breath, and later creeping slowly and laboriously forward. Then would come a mile or two of track that ran along the flank of a larger hill, and Gervase would be compelled to tread on the sides of his feet in order to maintain his equilibrium, until every muscle was racked by cramp.

But this day's march and that which followed it were ease and comfort exemplified when compared with the ascent of the big mountains that lay beyond the fringe of foothills. Here, for an hour at a time, the track would run steadily skyward at a grade of one foot ascended for every three feet of distance traversed, the climbers using the gnarled roots of trees and shrubs as a rude staircase by means of which they mounted painfully, a step at a time. Gervase could feel his heart flogging against his ribs like a sledge-hammer, and every now and again it would leap up into his gullet, turning him sick and faint. The Dyaks trailed after him panting and blaspheming, and the little Mûrut bearers, bent double beneath their loaded knapsacks, whistled shrilly through their noses, which is the fashion of exhaling the breath that is adopted by these strange people. There came moments when the task seemed to Gervase impossible of accomplishment, the track endless, the pitiless ascent an eternal punishment inflicted for unforgivable sin. Heat, thirst, exhaustion,

the agonized drawing of breath that came unreadily, the Sisyphus-like effort of propelling a dead weight up a mountain-side to no apparent purpose, combined to torture him; but still he struggled on from daybreak to sundown, allowing no rest to himself or to his fellows, gritting his teeth and doggedly bearing everything for the sake of his dead friend. And at each step of the way, the memory of Tom Burnaby nerved and encouraged him afresh. A little pied water-wagtail flitted on ahead of Gervase as he climbed the mountain-side, alighting here and there on a naked boulder with its tail seesawing restlessly, skimming on again for a short distance with a flirt of tiny feathers, looking back at the toiling men, waiting for them, and seeming to urge them to renewed exertion. In Gervase's overwrought mind, the notion awoke that this bird was, in some strange manner, a reincarnation of his friend. He was conscious throughout that the idea was incongruous and fantastic; but, none the less, the conceit pleased him, made him feel less forlorn, and once he even spoke aloud to the little flitting thing, half-deceiving himself into the belief that Burnaby could hear him. Physical overstrain endured in a tropical environment reacts upon the mind, and saner men than Gervase Fornier have entertained notions quite as wild when their bodies have been taxed almost past endurance.

It was late in the afternoon of the fifth day that the band of weary wayfarers, led by Gervase, found themselves approaching Bânat through a wilderness of virgin forest. They had traversed the distance in a day less

than they had anticipated, and the wild Mûruts of the transmontane region through which they had passed had not attempted to do them any injury. None the less, the Dyaks had reported to Fournier that there were rumours of trouble and unrest current among the people, and that half a tribe of wild folk from the interior had gone upon the warpath. It was said that they meditated an attack upon the stockade at Bânat, which was no longer rendered an object of fear to them now that the man was dead whom they had been accustomed to hold in reverence and awe. A very short while before, such news would have thrown Gervase into a state of emotional convulsions. Now it thrilled him indeed, but merely with excitement, and even with a kind of wild joy because the chance might perhaps be afforded to him of doing something, in his turn, for Burnaby, of carrying on the dead man's work, of saving all that was left of him from insult and desecration. Once or twice, when a couple of naked Mûruts slipped noiselessly out of the forest close at his elbow, his heart stood still, but his hand flew to the butt of his revolver, and he knew that he had had no thought save that of fighting manfully. This strengthened the newly acquired self-confidence within him, making him feel that at last, perhaps, he had found a foothold upon something solid in his nature, and these triumphs over his natural weakness warmed him with a curious sensation of pleasure. Burnaby would not think so badly of him if he could see him now; and, who shall say?—maybe Tom Burnaby *could* see him. The notion fortified him afresh, and as he neared the danger zone about the Bânat stockade, he

stepped forward confidently, holding his head erect.

Bânat itself stands in a large opening in the forest on the banks of a big river, but the track which Gervase was following leads thither through half-a-dozen smaller clearings encircled by jungle. It was into one of the least of these open spaces that Gervase Fornier came suddenly as the sun was sinking, the packed forest behind him throwing a massive shadow across the rank grass, the slanting rays from the west lighting up the gray stems and trunks of the trees that fenced the clearing upon its eastern side. In a moment, he was aware of a crowd of squalid creatures leaping frantically to their feet, their naked brown bodies dappled by the sunlight, their eyes glinting through tangles of frowsy hair, their limbs thrown this way and that in grotesque gesticulations. Then, of a sudden, half-a-dozen explosions shattered the silence of the afternoon, half-a-dozen puffs of white smoke leaped forth from the mob of savage creatures to hang immovable in the still air, and a chorus of wild war-whoops set the forest echoes ringing. Before he had had time in which to forecast risks or to imagine dangers, long before he had had an opportunity to feel afraid, before, in fact, he was aware of what he was doing, Gervase Fornier had flung himself headlong into the crowd of Mûruts, his six-shooter spitting like a wildcat. He saw first one savage face, distorted by fear and excitement, and then another, break up in a sort of splash, as of a puddle into which a stone is cast violently, rapidly changing its colour from brown to red. He fired at a brown back, whose owner was diving into the forest in panic-stricken flight, and

immediately two arms were thrown heavenward as the figure pitched forward limply and lay still. He saw his Dyaks, with their long knives drawn, dealing awful deaths on all sides of him; and then, as suddenly as its peace had been broken, silence fell upon the clearing once more, and Gervase was standing there, throbbing with a wild excitement, panting and sweating from his exertions, and with a red-hot revolver in his grasp. And, with a kind of dazed wonder, he realized that he had felt no fear; that he had not even had a thought of serving Burnaby by attacking the Mûruts who had fired upon him; that from first to last he had been propelled by the promptings of sheer primordial instinct, and that the only emotion of which he had been conscious had been a furious rage that had held him like a possession.

Marred bodies lay around him sprawling grotesquely among the rank growths of the clearing, and from three of these he had torn the souls with his own hand, fighting for his life with an intoxication of joy in his heart such as he had never before experienced. And in that instant it flashed across his mind that never again would it be possible for him to feel afraid of Mûruts or of any other natives. The consciousness of the racial superiority of the white man over the brown had come to him with the force of absolute conviction. Gervase Fornier's new-born manhood had been baptized in blood.

The Dyaks, wild with the exhilaration of battle, were gathered in a mob, discussing the fight with a yapping of talk and laughter, and making a hum as of disturbed

bees in a hive. As Gervase stood apart, their headman turned to him and addressed him in Malay.

“O Mother of mine, *Túan!*” he exclaimed. “We did not suspect it, but you, *Túan*, are in truth a very brave man. I was filled with apprehension when I saw you plunge in that headlong fashion into the mob of Mûrut folk, and for our part we had no choice but to follow. Even *Túan Bambi* fought not in this wise. We Dyak people love greatly to follow such a leader.”

And the recognition by the little brown warrior of the one virtue that all men prize more than aught else thrilled Gervase strangely, and sent the blood pulsing through his veins and flushing his cheek.

How Gervase Fornier started the next day upon a raid into the interior, whence the Mûruts who had attacked him had come; how he returned after many days accompanied by three hundred cowed wretches bending under the loads of jars which represented the fines inflicted upon them for their attempt to break the peace of the Government; how he kept them with him until each man among them had carried up a hundred large stones from the river bed and had piled them on the grave within which Burnaby's bones had been laid to rest; how that huge cairn, which was the surest protection against insult that could be afforded to the dead, became in time the centre round which clustered half the superstitions of the valley—are not these things written in the records of Kalamantan, and scored deeply into the memories of certain Mûrut tribesmen (now comparatively orderly and exemplary members of society) who are filled with a great awe, and,

drunk or sober, swear by the very toe-nails of Tûan Fornier?

Later, the second-in-command, who was also the Headquarters Resident, came up country to Bânat to inquire into recent events, and returned to the capital to make his report in person to his chief.

"You can't do better than let young Fornier have sole charge up there, sir," he said. "He has got a grip on the people that is worth all the theories of administration in the world, and I doubt whether we shall have any more trouble in the district for ages. I can't understand it. The boy is completely changed. He loves his job and is as keen as mustard."

"Didn't I tell you that sending him to an out-station was the only chance of making something of him?" said the Chief, who, like most senior officials, liked to find occasional confirmation of his own belief in his infallibility. "You see I was right. The heart of Kalamantan has turned a waster into a good officer."

But, to my thinking, the heart of Kalamantan would have been powerless to effect any change in the youngster had it not been for the heart of poor Tom Burnaby, by whose rude grave Gervase Fornier sits evening after evening, careless of an unprotected back, communing silently with the dead as though he still lived.

Bânat, though it is wilder and far more lonely than his former district in the heart of Kalamantan, can have no solitude for him while his friend lies so near at hand.

FATHER ROUELLOT

I

HE WAS born and bred in the quaint little town of Dinan in Brittany, in those half-forgotten days when the place was still a backwater untroubled by the current of the great world beyond its ancient walls of mortar-bound rubble. His early horizon was limited by a few miles of apple orchard lying around the town, through which the glaring white roads stretched away into the unknown; by Lehon in the valley, grouped about the ruins of its once splendid abbey; by the little village of Lanvallais, across the deep cleft of the Rance's narrow bed; and by half-a-dozen reaches of the brown water of the river between lock and lock. It was not a wide outlook, but it had been that of his forbears for many generations; and since in those days "the military" had not yet come to bring an alien element to Dinan, the railway had not penetrated to a point nearer than Dol, and municipalities had not yet arisen to pull down walls and ramparts old in story and to deface ancient landmarks, Jean Rouellot and his fellows were well contented with their lot in life.

As a child, he was doubtless an abominable little *gamin*, for this is the nature of small boys—and especially of small French boys—in even the most secluded localities. Also, whenever he espied a member

of the *colonie anglaise*, it was his custom to scream "*Anglishman pointu!*" after him at the top of his shrill treble pipe, in token of his contempt and derision. In common with the other urchins of the place, Jean did this on principle. The phrase, and the line or two of unprintable doggerel that tag on to it, are probably designed to perpetuate some scandalous memory, though to modern ears they are pointless. As a time-honoured insult to the foreigner, however, they are greatly approved by the male youth of Brittany even to this day.

In Dinan, hatred and contempt for the English was an inherited superstition among the boys of the town—and how should it be otherwise? A statue of Duguesclin—the Lion of Brittany—stood triumphant and victorious in the centre of the old *place* that bore his name, surrounded by the sweet-smelling lime trees, and was a monument eloquent of the defeat and humiliation of an arrogant and ancient foe. The heart of the hero, who so loved the pleasant Breton country, lay tombed in a shadowy recess within the walls of the cathedral of Saint-Sauveur; and tradition said that it beat anew with the old warlike pride whenever some brave deed, wrought for France by a man of Brittany, recalled the victories of the glorious past. Above the altar of the shrine which held Duguesclin's heart, there hung a large oil painting—a poor daub, villainously executed; but as Jean and his fellows knelt before it, telling their beads, with the pious peasant women, their mothers, wrapped in simple prayer beside them, the picture told its story to them and fired their young blood. A mail-clad form lay stretched in death upon a bier, and around

it were grouped men in armour—warriors of a distant past—grave, sad, with bared heads, and solemn, awe-stricken faces. One of these, a tall, fair-haired Englishman, was in the act of placing a bunch of keys upon the breast of the dead man, where the pale hands lay folded reverently. Every boy in Dinan knew the story of the English knight who, when forced by famine to surrender the fortress he had held so long, refused to yield to any save the Lion of Brittany himself, and as Duguesclin lay dead in the French camp, came to place the keys of his citadel on the breast of the hero, shedding tears of mourning for the victor whom death had robbed of his last triumph.

“Be sure our hero’s heart beat then,” said Victorine Rouellot, Jean’s mother, as she and her sons walked home from church, through the bright sunshine, when Mass was ended. “And remember, my children, whenever a good deed is done for France and for *le bon Dieu* the heart of our dear Duguesclin beats anew with joy.”

“*O maman!*” cried Jean. “When I grow up I will be a soldier, and I will fight for France and for *le bon Dieu*, and the heart of the great Duguesclin shall beat again because of the things that I will do.”

“For me,” said Alexandre, the eldest son, who was at once ambitious and prudent, “I will be a general in time of peace, and a cardinal of the Church in time of war. That will be *convenable*.”

“And I,” chimed in little Noel, who was small and sickly, clinging to his mother’s arm and looking up into her face. “I will stay at home and *soigner la petite maman*. That will be best of all.”

So the children talked, after the manner of the very young who as yet have no inkling of the fate which life is like to hold for them.

Later, however, Jean's dreams of military glory faded into nothingness, their place being taken by more serious thoughts which intensified as he grew older. He shared with all his people the simple, unquestioning religious faith of his forefathers, the which, in parts of Brittany, is still, perhaps, the most beautiful of all the survivals from the Middle Ages. He differed from the vast majority of his folk, however, in that he not only believed, but realized with extraordinary poignancy the full significance of his belief. The more he meditated upon the teachings of his religion, the more firm became his conviction that this life is but an anteroom to the life which is to come. Presently, what the French layman's prayer book, *Le Paroissien*, names "the nothingness of this world, the greatness of heaven, the shortness of time, and the length of eternity," assumed in his mind the force and value of *idées fixes*. They were conceptions that obsessed him, filling him with a passionate desire so to utilize his time upon earth that it might profit his fellow men and work the salvation of his own soul, so that when the day dawned after the night of travail, his God should receive him into His Kingdom. Eternal damnation on the one side, happiness on the other—how should any sane man who had the grace to realize the awfulness of the alternative hesitate to sacrifice the insignificant to win the infinite?

Soon, therefore, Jean went hither and thither about the old crumbling streets clad in the blue uniform of the

Séminaire, and wore a piece of violet velvet round the crown of his cloth cap. Also, he sought to fight the boys of the *Collège*, who wore crimson velvet hat bands, in as Christian and self-denying a spirit as circumstances and their vicious pugnacity rendered possible. To this end, when battle was unavoidable, he engaged adversaries who were many sizes too big for him; and though he generally sustained severe damage in these encounters, he emerged from them invincibly cheerful and contented.

Later still came separation from his mother and brothers, for the time had arrived for his departure for Paris, where he was to undergo the five years' probation which is part of the severe education of a Roman Catholic priest. He rumbled off in the great *diligence*, a forlorn young figure, half cleric, half layman, and his mother stood in the eddying dust thrown up by the clumsy wheels and by the hoofs of the big horses, crying "*Courage! Courage!*" in a quavering voice, while the tears chased one another unchecked down her kind, travail-worn face. Then she turned away sobbing, brushing her toil-hardened hand across her eyes, her heart wrung by the pang that comes to every mother when the first of her brood takes wing. She was only an old Breton peasant woman, ignorant and superstitious, clad in the rough homespun petticoat of her people, with a coarse shawl draped across her breast, with wooden *sabots* on her feet, and with her tanned and lined face framed in a quaint white linen mutch, elaborately starched and folded; but the sword of which Simeon spoke pierced her soul with a pang no whit less

keen because life for her held nothing save *le bon Dieu*, her household cares, and the children whom her God had sent to comfort her early widowhood.

The days crept by, each one of them slow enough in its passage; but the weeks drifted into months, the months welded themselves together and became years, imperceptibly, swiftly, as is their manner when life is marked by few events and each monotonous day is the spit and image of all its fellows. Alexandre, having escaped military conscription, and having served his apprenticeship with a draper in the town, took to himself a *fiancée*, after elaborate family negotiations. The damsel of his choice was a pretty little girl who persisted in spoiling her appearance by wearing a fusty-looking bonnet in place of the dainty white mutch that had contented her mother and all her female ancestors for countless generations. But Alexandre, and indeed all the Rouellot connection, regarded this headgear as the high-water mark of advancing civilization and were immensely proud of it.

Little Noel, little no longer, and now grown into a great hulking Breton peasant, round of cheek and ruddy of complexion, had drawn an unlucky number at the last conscription, and in company with a band of other semi-intoxicated youngsters, who were in the same plight as himself, had swaggered out of Dinan, with shouts of assumed merriment on his lips and with tears running down his face.

Victorine Rouellot had come to live in the house just within the Porte Saint-Malo, whence starts the white road that leads to Dinard. She sat in her doorway spin-

ning—always spinning or roasting coffee beans—during the long hot summers, or crouched in the inglenook, hard by the great box bedstead fashioned of oak black with years, with her wheel still revolving ceaselessly, when the winters came to chill her to the bone. Occasionally, a neighbour would pause to speak a word or two to her, to inquire after her absent sons, or to relate some simple matter of news or gossip; but for the rest, her memories of the past were her only companions in her solitude. The house was terribly still—all the stiller because it was haunted by the thought of the pattering of baby feet and the sound of childish voices which of old had filled it—and the eyes that Victorine fixed upon the yarn over which she laboured were often dim with tears. And so the five years of Jean's probation passed away, and the news came at length to his widowed mother that her son was shortly to be ordained in Paris.

It was a bitter grief to the lonely woman that her poverty made it impossible for her to be present at the ceremony; but comfort came when she received a letter from Jean saying that, on the day succeeding his ordination, he would return to Dinan, there to say his first unassisted Mass in the presence of his mother and of those who had known him as a child. How she longed for the day to come—fearful, almost, that she would not survive to see its dawn. How she haunted the dim chapels of the cathedral, and what prayers she offered up to *le bon Dieu* of petition and of thanksgiving. He was a priest now—a servant of God—a miracle worker—her little Jean; and already she saw in imagina-

tion the quiet country *presbytère*, with the church and steeple and the one irregular village street, where her son should begin his life's work, and where she would be to him at once mother, counsellor, and housekeeper. And at last the long-looked-for evening arrived.

Victorine Rouellot was waiting at the *diligence* office hours before the old coach was due; and when at last it lumbered up the cobble-paved street, which flanks the Place Duguesclin, her eyes were so veiled by tears that she could not distinguish Jean among the passengers, and told herself in an agony of disappointment that he had not come. But as she still stood confusedly turning from one person to another, two long arms clad in black were thrown tempestuously around her neck, and a tall, slim young man, wearing a long *soutane* and a broad-brimmed beaver hat, was kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other, and was fairly lifting her off her feet in the fervour of his embraces.

"Oh, is it thou, *mon gars, mon pauvre gars?*" was all that the poor old woman could find voice to say as she clung to him convulsively, and kissed him again and again. Her tears were falling thick and fast, but they were tears of joy and thankfulness, though it seemed to her that never till now had she realized the full measure of the loneliness which had been hers since Noel was taken from her by that cruel army.

Presently, the mother and son walked away together through the familiar streets, Jean feasting his eyes upon each well-known landmark, noting with surprise how small they had become during his absence, but feeling that they, too, were friends that welcomed him on his

homecoming. Victorine still held him by the arm with a nervous clutch, as though she were afraid to relax her hold lest he should vanish and elude her. From time to time, she gazed up proudly into his face, trying to recognize the child she had loved and the lad who had left her five years before, in the young man who now towered above her. His was a sufficiently commonplace figure in the eyes of the casual observer—that of a tall young priest with true, honest blue eyes, rather colourless hair that had a slight ripple in it, and a firm strong mouth which told of much self-repression and perhaps of a little of the priggishness of the young religious. He walked with his hat in his hand, for the evening was warm, but there was no sign of a tonsure on his head, and a sparse, newly grown beard fringed his face. It was this that first attracted his mother's attention when her happy tears had dried and she could once more see clearly.

“But, my Jean,” she exclaimed, “wherefore, then, hast thou a beard?”

The members of the Roman Catholic priesthood in France, as in most parts of Europe, are invariably clean shaven.

“Ah, my mother,” replied the young priest, looking down at her very tenderly but somewhat fearfully, as though he dreaded the effect of the communication he was about to make. “I did not tell thee by letter, for I was loth to do so till I could be by thy side to comfort thee; but the nature of my vocation has been made clear to me. I have joined *La Société des Missions Étrangères*.”

For a moment, the blow nearly stunned her. In an instant of time, all her fond plans for the life she and her son would live together were shattered, all her dreams dispelled. Instead, she saw before her a vista of long lonely years, stretching away in a sad and dreary perspective, while the son, whom in her heart she loved best of all her children, stood self-doomed to lifelong exile in those almost apocryphal lands which, as all Breton peasants know, are inhabited exclusively by savages and cannibals.

The priest who joins the French Society of Foreign Missions never again returns to France unless his health has broken down so completely that he has ceased to be of any service to his superiors. The missionaries, however, are mostly drawn from the peasantry who, as a class, are beyond all comparison the healthiest folk in France, and it is rare for one of their number to fail through lack of physique. As a rule, therefore, these men work on and on till they drop dead between the shafts to which they have yoked themselves, or toil and labour until old age at last bears them down. In the latter case, they have usually become too accustomed to the fierce heats of the land of their exile for it to be safe to send them back to die in the country in which they were born, even if they still have the wish to return to surroundings that have long ceased to be familiar to them, even in dreams.

Victorine knew this, as what mothers do not among the simple peasant folk of France, who yearly give of their best that the Society of Foreign Missions may enlist the soldiers it needs with which to carry on its un-

ending-war against paganism? Therefore, the terror which chilled her was not without its justification of sure knowledge. When she had recovered from the shock sufficiently to be once more aware of all that was going on around her, she found that Jean was speaking words of consolation in her ear.

"It is a great sacrifice, my mother," he was saying. "And heavier for thee than for me; but we must offer it up for the greater glory of God. And even for me, it is sad to leave the beautiful France, and all the so dear memories of my own country and people, to go far away to the land of the pagans. But I go at the bidding of *le bon Dieu*—as His messenger, to bear His Word and the good news of redemption to the poor benighted ones. And I go because I am called. I feel that I am called, *ma chère maman*; and the Father Superior says that I should sin against God's grace and against the guidance of the Holy Spirit were I to disregard the summons. What wouldst thou have? If it be the will of God, must I not leave even thee, my mother, in order to obey?"

"The will of the good God be done," said the widow sorrowfully; but it seemed as though the words choked her.

After Jean's homecoming, there followed the happiest fortnight of his or of his mother's life. All the people in Dinan conspired to do honour to the grave young *abbé*, whom they had known as a child, and who was now about to quit his home for ever. On the first Sunday after his return, Saint-Sauveur was crowded to

overflowing, and Jean, assisted by two ancient priests who acted respectively as his deacon and sub-deacon, sang High Mass in his fresh young voice. The crazy old organ bellowed and groaned like a soul in torment; the discordant ophicleide and the violoncello in the chancel raced each other in headlong fashion and wrangled over every bar; the choir was acrobatic rather than melodious. Jean had learned during his five years' sojourn in Paris what grand church music can be; but, none the less, the tumult of irregular sound echoing through the old cathedral and awaking a thousand memories of his boyhood fell sweetly on his ears. Again, in retrospect, he and his brothers knelt grouped around their mother's knee, praying simple prayers, and saw stretching before them a life that held nothing but victories, and that made no demand for suffering or for sacrifice.

"He hath the air of an angel, Victorine," whispered an old peasant woman to Jean's mother, beside whom she knelt on a rush-bottomed chair; but it was "The tender thought of a day that is dead," and the youthful enthusiasm kindled by a sense of the greatness of the mission confided to him from Above, which lent that light and softness to the young priest's homely face.

Later, when the Gospel had been chanted and Jean and his two attendant priests had taken their seat at the foot of the chancel in full view of the whole congregation, M. le Curé mounted the pulpit and preached a sermon which had the young missionary for its text. With very few exceptions, all the people in the crowded

church knew Jean Rouellot—nay, had known him in his *gamin* days, when his manners had still left much to be desired. To-day, however, all memories of the old Jean were effaced by the thought of the slim young priest who was about to turn his back upon his own people, upon his country, upon all that men hold dear, upon all that spells happiness to commonplace souls, in order to carry the Word of God to a benighted nation beyond the seas. So no one saw anything incongruous in the flowery eulogies which the good *curé* pronounced with abundant rhetoric and with true French enthusiasm and effusion, except Jean himself, who found that the sermon which was designed to do him honour served only to humiliate him bitterly.

Thereafter the pleasant days flew by, and at last the night arrived which was the eve of Jean's departure. Noel had obtained leave of absence from his regiment at Rennes, and Alexandre, accompanied by Monsieur and Madame Aubert and their daughter Eulalie, his *fiancée*, had also come to supper. Monsieur Aubert, supremely uncomfortable in the thick broadcloth coat which he only donned on Sundays, was elaborately polite to Victorine Rouellot, and very respectful toward the young priest; and though he paused now and again in his slow speech to spit noisily upon the floor, that was the custom of the country, and nobody appeared to mind. Victorine and Madame Aubert looked neat and sweet in the homely peasant dress, with their kindly, honest faces softened by their white starched mutches. Little Eulalie, in her town-made clothes, wearing a jacket

instead of a shawl, and with a bonnet on her head, was in rather tawdry contrast to her elders; but Alexandre looked at her with adoring eyes, and she smiled gaily in response.

Perhaps a momentary pang stabbed the heart of the young priest as he noted the lovelight in the faces of his brother and his *fiancée*, and remembered that no such beacon would ever shine for him over the stormy seas of life; but if so, the twinge of regret must have endured only for an instant. Jean still realized what the others only believed, and to him the manner in which the few short days of his existence upon earth were to be spent seemed to matter little, if only they might enable him to win in safety to the infinite Hereafter.

The little party ate delicious brown *galettes*, made of buckwheat, which looked like mottled damp dusters; unspeakable salt cod, such as the Breton folk love; veal from which the strength had already been boiled into the soup; curds and sugar as a sweet, and numerous other local dainties which Jean would never taste again and of which the memory was destined often to haunt him. Each member of the company did his or her best to keep up the spirits of the others, and to forget as far as possible the sorrow that would come with the morning, and they chatted and laughed as merrily as a flock of starlings on a rooftree. But when the Auberts had taken their departure, the three brothers gathered round the huge fireplace with their mother in their midst, and, for a space, it seemed almost as though the old days had returned to them. They fell a-talking disjointedly of hours long passed away, with

“Dost thou remember?” and “Dost thou recall?” and “Ah, the happy time!”

“And so,” sighed Noel at length—“and so, no one of our prophecies has proved true. See, our Alexandre, who was to have been general and cardinal in one, has become a worthy shopkeeper, and wears neither the cocked hat nor the scarlet skullcap. Moreover, he hath killed the fatted calf—did we not eat the good veal but an hour ago?—and is setting up as a family man. And thou, Jean—or should I call thy reverence *mon père*?—thou, who wast to have gone forth to do great deeds as a soldier for France, thou art turned saint, and it will be by virtue of thy prayers that I, the *vaurien*, the reprobate of the family, will hope to be smuggled into heaven when the day of reckoning comes. In the meantime, it is for me to do the deeds—if in verity they are to be wrought by a Rouellot—that shall make the heart of the great Duguesclin beat anew.”

“Nay,” said Victorine, very softly. “Nay, my children. Perhaps it is our Jean who will do the great things for France and for *le bon Dieu* among the poor pagans. He goes forth a soldier of Christ into a distant land, and I know that our dear Duguesclin’s heart is beating even now with pride on his account.”

She smiled fondly at Jean, and pressed his hand with her kind, toil-worn fingers, while he smiled back at her, but very sadly.

“But, alas, my brothers,” he said, “of all the three of us, there is found no one to stay at home to *soigner la petite maman*.”

And then a great silence fell upon them all.

II

The French Society of Foreign Missions pushes its pieces hither and thither across the great chessboard of the East with a hand as pitiless and as inexorable as that of Destiny itself. The Society cannot afford to concern itself too closely with the personal convenience of its pawns, or to allow itself to be moved by considerations of health, happiness, or any other mere mundane consideration. Its one motive, the sole object of its existence, is to play the game of skill in which it is pitted against ignorance, prejudice, and paganism to the best advantage, without missing a point that can properly be made. Jean Rouellot, in the hands of the Society, was a mere puppet, whose one duty was to obey; and in a space of little more than two months from the day upon which he bade a tearful farewell to his mother and brothers in the old Place Duguesclin, he was being taught many strange things at the college of Pûlau Tikus on the distant island of Penang. It was a curious world in which he now found himself. The fierce sunshine of the tropics glared down from out a white-hot sky upon the ugly, lime-washed college buildings with their shabby green jalousies behind which are nationalities concerning the very existence of which Jean, till then, had not entertained so much as a suspicion. There were Chinese of some seven different tribes, each of which spoke its own peculiar dialect Annamese, Tongkingese, Cochin-Chinese, Kambodians, Siamese, Burmese flat-featured, shaggy little gnomes from the Shan States and Laos in the valley of the

Mekong; sweepings of half the *Hinterlanden* of south-eastern Asia, and a stray waif or two who appeared to have blown in from no one knew precisely where. Had each member of the college been permitted to make use of his own dialect, the horrors of Babel would have been reproduced in an aggravated and intensified form, but the rule of the place was that every boy, no matter what his race, must speak to his fellows in one common tongue, and that, of all languages in the world, was Latin!

Many of the boys were half-breeds—*métis* from the French colonies of Indo-China, for the most part—whose fathers' interest in them had ceased when they were begotten. Many others were the sons of native Christians; and many more were strays and foundlings—superfluous children whose parents had exposed and abandoned them in accordance with time-honoured custom—whom the missionaries had collected from places to which even hardened explorers rarely penetrated.

Under the guidance of the Director of the Pûlau Tikus College, even the wildest and most unruly of its inmates were being gradually trained to become decent members of society. The inherited instincts of savagery, which still lurked in the recesses of the natures of some of them, were being patiently, slowly, but certainly eradicated. The lopsided vision which, in the East, often leads thought from left to right, exalts vice into virtue, and works such strange confusion between evil and good was being laboriously corrected and readjusted. A sound education, which included a knowl-

edge of English, was being employed as a means of expanding their minds; cricket and football—games which reminded Jean of the *Anglishman pointus* of old Dinan days—were teaching this mixed multitude of Asiatics the value of pluck and physical prowess, and the advantages which attend unselfishness and combination in action. Some of the lads eventually became priests, and many of these were a credit to their calling; others contented themselves with becoming lay school-teachers; but the majority went forth to work as clerks in mercantile offices or in the government service, or to fill the rôle of an honest citizen in some other walk of life. It was the aim of the priests to bring up their pupils to be solid, honest Christians, sober and practical men who should be well fitted to take hold of their lives by the right end, and to fight their way bravely through the battle of existence. And in this the missionaries attained a wonderful success, for they studied the character of each boy with the closest sympathy and care, and so, rarely failed to make a good workaday sort of money pouch out of even the roughest sow's ear.

But Jean Rouellot, being young and untried, was not entrusted with such serious and difficult work as that of moulding youthful pagan souls into Christian shape. Perhaps, in the flush of the exaltation of spirit engendered in him by the outburst of enthusiasm and applause which had greeted him during his brief visit to Dinan, Jean had for a moment or two shared the popular opinion that he was something of a hero. The magnitude of the sacrifice which he was making—the awfulness of it, as seen by the eyes of his own people—

may have caused him to forget for a little space the motive which drove him forth from among his fellows to labour at the ends of the earth for the service of God and of His creatures. But however uplifted he may have felt while he was still in France or on the voyage out, however romantic his self-inflicted exile may have appeared to him, however exceptional his mission and his resolve, here, in Asia, the halo of mystery and of heroism surrounding the life to which he was devoting himself was speedily and uncompromisingly dispelled. Here he was one of many, and the last and least considered of all. Instead of being an object of interest, a person to be revered and admired for his self-sacrifice, he found himself in the commonplace position of a pupil once again, with a whole world of difficult things to learn. He was set to acquire a dialect of Chinese—the Hak-Ka, which the Ke miners speak—that has a good many more tones than you have fingers on your right hand. This means that the same syllable, as we should represent it in writing, takes to itself seven or eight entirely distinct significances according to the precise key in which, while pronouncing it, the speaker's voice is pitched.

At first Jean went near to despairing of ever being able to acquire a language of such diabolical difficulty; but his superiors encouraged him, and he toiled at his study of it day and night with an almost savage energy. The reaction following upon his exaltation and enthusiasm was pressing sorely upon him; he was wrung by the pangs of a great and bitter homesickness; and, behind all, there rose to sadden him the worn face of his mother,

and the picture of her seated beside the empty hearth, deserted of all her sons, and thinking in her desolation of the days that could never come again.

At last, after six months of hopeless groping, Jean began to develop the *instinct* for the tones—there is no other term that expresses the thing with accuracy; and at the end of the first year he was bidden to deliver a lecture to a class of grinning young Hak-Ka students. It has been said of the white man among the Chinese that “he gets little credit for anything that he happens to know, but rather discredit for the things which he does not know”; and Jean Rouellot’s knowledge of the Ke dialect was admittedly slender. His audience felt themselves from the outset to be in a position of towering superiority, and their capacity for feeling and exhibiting contempt had been notably developed through watching the linguistic flounders of a score of budding missionaries. Their whispered criticisms, which were too swift and colloquial to be intelligible to the young priest, had a vitriolic pungency, what time the impassive countenance of the speaker rendered rebuke a risky experiment. Jean had looked forward to the lecture for weeks and had prepared his discourse with a care that would have done credit to a whole college of professors. In the presence of these frankly bored and contemptuous boys, however, he found his knowledge of Hak-Ka dropping from him like a mantle from his shoulders. The whole thing was a lamentable failure, and Jean retired to his stuffy little room scarlet in the face with shame and mortification, and more dispirited and homesick, more filled with longing for his

mother and for his Breton friends and relatives than he had ever been before.

On the next occasion he did better, partly because he sternly suppressed insubordination from the outset, and partly because he now knew something of his limitations, and was careful not to attempt too much. Six months later, therefore, he was actually permitted to preach his first sermon in Chinese, and was declared to have come creditably through the ordeal.

When Jean reached this stage in his training he heaved a sigh of relief. The worst of the drudgery was over, he told himself, and now, being fully equipped for the battle, he would be suffered to go forth from within the narrow limits of the college into the wider fields of missionary labour. But, in so thinking, Jean showed that he underrated at once the wisdom of his superiors and the amount of what miners call "dead work" which the Society is accustomed to exact from its probationers. No sooner had the Hak-Ka dialect ceased to present any great difficulties to him than he was set to the study of Cantonese, which bears the same sort of relationship to the former that Italian bears to Spanish. Having already mastered the initial secret of tonic expression, he acquired a working knowledge of this new dialect in the course of a few months of unremitting study; and was then set to acquire an acquaintance with Hok-Kien. This dialect is more widely divergent from both Hak-Ka and Cantonese than are those modes of speech from one another, and by the time Jean had become familiar with it, he had spent the best part of five years in Malaya. During all this long while he

had been sitting at the feet of wise old priests who knew as much about Chinese character as you know about simple arithmetic; and watching them and listening to their words he had obtained some insight into the nature of the souls on whose behalf he was to labour out his days. He was now pronounced to be qualified to undertake missionary work, and in due course he was drafted out of the college, and was attached to an old priest in a distant parish, there to act as his assistant.

The man who at length emerged from the college of Pûlau Tîkus, to take up the work of the Society that had made him, was a very different Jean Rouellot from the slim young priest who had sung his first High Mass upon that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday in the old cathedral of Saint-Sauveur. Then he had been little more than a boy, with all the enthusiastic dreams and all the ignorance of life that go with boyhood. Now he was a man, moulded and tried, with a true if exalted understanding of his mission, but with no trace remaining of the taint of priggishness which had slightly marred his early piety. He looked upon life through those honest blue eyes of his with no unkindly glance. He was imbued with that wide sympathy, that liberal ability to make allowances, which come to a man with a more complete comprehension of human nature, human temptations, human weaknesses. His beard had grown full and bushy, and his cheeks above it showed swarthy and rather pallid, with the colouring matter parched out of the skin by the fierce sun glare of the tropics. His face, though still that of a young man, was lined deeply by the furrows which experience, study, and

knowledge plough in the human countenance; but there were humorous wrinkles about his eyes, which showed that the spirit of fun still remained alive in the heart of Jean Rouellot.

Years succeeded years, and Jean was sent hither and thither from one post to another, learning new things at every step—saying Mass daily; preaching three short practical sermons every Sunday, one in each of the dialects of Chinese with which he was most familiar; carrying comfort and consolation to the dying; praying by the mats of the sick; dispensing physic and good counsel to all who sought them; catechizing small parishioners, who were horribly bored by the operation and were at no great pains to conceal the fact; watching would-be converts through the long period of probation which the Roman Catholic missionaries have wisely determined to be a necessary preliminary to baptism; and doing incidentally unnumbered acts of kindness and of heroism, too common, too dull, too obscure to attract the attention of the outside world, too much a part of his daily duty to call forth the remark or the approbation of his superiors.

At last, when Jean had served in the Malay Peninsula for more than a decade and a half, he was sent to open a new mission in one of the native states which had recently been placed under British protection. The only white men in the place were Englishmen—the *Anglish-man pointus*, whereof his boyhood's memories still survived; and of their language he could speak no word. There was no church or presbytery, and Jean had not a *sou* to his name beyond the fifteen silver dollars a

month which is all that the Society allows its priests for the defrayal of their personal expenses. Members of some other missions do not wholly despise the loaves and fishes; others not only preach the Gospel, but make it their business to live by it on a scale that need put no one to shame. Is not the labourer worthy of his hire? And there are yet others—good and earnest men enough—who for the sake of their wives and little ones are compelled to secure for themselves a sufficiency of the things of this world, before they can attempt to win for others a share in the things of the world that is to come. The Roman Catholic priests of the French Society of Foreign Missions, however, have no such compensations. No reasonable being can suppose that these men lead the lives we watch and wonder at because they find them intrinsically attractive. The explorer, or the civil or military officer who chances to be engaged in the pioneer work of the Empire, may have, for a space, a rougher time and poorer rations even than those that fall to the lot of the missionary priest. Their reward, however, is well in sight; a love of adventure helps a man to endure much; and they always have the consolation of knowing that the longest journey, the most difficult expedition, or the most heart-breaking succession of dreary little fights must surely have an end in the course of a few months, or in a year or two at most. But for the priest of the *Société des Missions Etrangères* the travail and the toil, the poverty and the privations usually continue undiminished and unrelieved until the day of his death. No one ever mentions *him* in despatches; no king, delighting to honour,

tacks a comet's tail of capital letters after *his* name, he does not even write a book about his great deeds and his unparalleled experiences; and he never goes back to the land of his birth to be fêted by relatives and friends, or to be overfed by enthusiastic corporations. Instead, he labours on in silence and obscurity, often within handshaking distance of starvation, always oppressed by a grinding poverty, without a single consolation to solace him save that which he derives from the faith that is in him.

Father Rouellot went to Kuâla Lûmut in the late seventies of last century, a stranger into a strange land, and there began his uphill fight with perfect serenity and content. He lived in a dilapidated little hut, the roof of which let in more rain water than it kept out sunbeams; and here he was grilled by the pitiless heat by day, and drenched by the heavy dews at night. His diet consisted of bananas—a fruit which is cheap and filling at the price—and cold tea, which he brewed for himself once a week and stored in a couple of buckets which were almost the only articles of luxury that he possessed. Much of his time would have been wasted had he done any cooking; and though bananas and cold tea are not precisely stimulating, they supplied Father Rouellot with enough vitality to enable him to wander about on foot, in his shabby black *soutane* and his khaki-covered sun helmet, during most of the hottest hours of the blazing tropical day. He visited all the least savoury places in the squalid native town, and spent hour after hour in the fusty *kong-si* houses, inhabited by the mining coolies, where a man could

barely squeeze a passage between the tiers of bed curtains redolent of the odours peculiar to opium-smoking dens and to the Chinese race. Here he talked of all things in heaven and earth to the half-naked and partially drugged miners, who squatted on their bunks and marvelled at the "foreign devil" who could speak "men's language"; and little by little he began to win the shy confidence of the people who lived around him. His black figure, showing like a smudge of soot against the green Malayan landscape, became a familiar sight wherever men suffered sickness or needed the aid of a disinterested and self-sacrificing friend. In those days, few white men in the native states could speak any native language except Malay, and the Chinese coolies, who hitherto had been largely at the mercy of their employers, the *Tau-kehs*, and of unscrupulous interpreters, began presently to pour out their grievances to Father Rouellot, the man who could understand them and who had inspired their confidence. Thus, more than once, he was able to make representations on their behalf to the English officials, whose language he had learned with surprising quickness; and when all concerned had become convinced that the good priest sought nothing for himself, his influence spread rapidly, and a respectful ear was lent to his advice and to his pleadings.

Gradually, Father Rouellot increased the number of his slender congregation. The rules of the Society compelled him to subject every convert to a long period of trial before he finally received him into the Church, and many fell away under the searching test applied to

them. Others, however, persevered, and the example which the priest set to all who watched his life made more converts than could have been won by many sermons preached with the tongues of men and of angels. Curiosity brought men to witness the Mass which Father Rouellot said daily under the tree before his dwelling, or to crowd into the single room of his hut when the rain fell too heavily for out-of-door worship; and as the Chinese are a thoughtful and a philosophical people, curiosity in many cases led to inquiry, inquiry to belief.

At last, a rich Chinese *Tau-keh*—whose acquaintance with the Father had originated in a pitched battle between the two, in which the cause of some oppressed coolies had been fiercely championed by Jean, to their employer's no small mortification and annoyance—not only forgave the injury done him, but actually proposed himself as a convert. Father Rouellot treated this man with something not unlike tyranny, for he suspected his motives; but when the *Tau-keh* abandoned, at the priest's bidding, all the pleasant vices to which he had been addicted, and applied himself to the study of his catechism like the good little boy he was trying hard to become, Jean's heart was mightily uplifted, and he joyfully accepted this important addition to his flock as a gift sent to him direct from *le bon Dieu*.

"And now, my father," said the *Tau-keh*, when he had risen from his knees after making a long prayer of thanksgiving for the newly received baptism, "you have given great things to me, so suffer me also to make to you a small and unworthy present. Let me build you

a house, for it is not fitting that I, and even my coolies, should fare so much better than you."

"No, no, my friend," said Jean. "See first how our dear Lord is housed. That is a shame, in very truth, for it is He who hath given so much to us all. If you would make an offering in token of gratitude for your conversion, let it be to the Giver of all things. Build a church, my friend, or, rather, help others to build one."

So a subscription list was started, and the *Tau-keh* headed it with a handsome sum, and Father Rouellot gave up his cold tea and sold the precious brace of buckets, and by means of these and other economies eventually succeeded in contributing a whole fifty-dollar note to the fund. It was not a large subscription, but it represented more than three months' income and entailed excessively unwholesome starvation for a period of four times that duration.

"I suppose some people would call this bowing down in the House of Rimmon," said the Resident, when the subscription list was brought to him. (He had not entered a church for years, but he entertained some vague notion that he was a member of the Church of England.) "Anyway," he added, "one can't do much harm by bowing down in the same house with a man like Father Rouellot, so here goes for a hundred dollars."

Others followed the Resident's lead, for it was impossible for the officials, of whom the white population of Kûala Lûmat was at that time exclusively composed, to avoid surrendering their preconceived prejudices in

favour of the simple French priest, whose unostentatious sanctity and complete forgetfulness of self commanded the admiration even of those who most disliked the faith of which he was a minister. From which it will be seen that Jean Rouellot, the Breton peasant, like Duguesclin of old, was conquering the stubborn English folk after a fashion of his own devising.

Sitting alone in his tumble-down hut, with the night noises of the Peninsula sounding from the jungles all around and emphasizing his solitude, Father Rouellot read and reread that subscription list by the light of the wisp of sodden rag floating in a saucer of oil which was his only lamp.

"But how they are generous!" he exclaimed aloud, over and over again. "My poor Chinese, and these English. How good they are to me—to me who once, *gamin* that I was, was wont to cry '*Anglishman poin-tu!*' at the heels of their compatriots in those so dear long past days. *Ah! la pauvre mère!* But she would be happy were she alive to see this day, or to hear of it in far-off Dinan. And the heart of our dear Duguesclin surely, surely it beats anew, for this is a better victory than any won by the sword."

Then his memory bore him away, far from the ticking of the restless jungle insects, the short, sharp hoots of the little horned owls, and the musical hiccuppings of the tree frogs, to the smiling Breton country, to the spreading orchards, the white fields of ripening buckwheat, the quaint crumbling houses of the old town with their upper stories bulging halfway across the nar-

row streets, to the dimly lighted interior of Saint-Sauveur, and to the loved familiar faces of his own people.

When he at length arose to undress for the night, Jean Rouellot's eyes were wet with tears.

After the church had been built, and a modest hut added thereto for the priest's accommodation, the years slid by quickly, bringing to Father Rouellot, as to all the rest of the world, days both good and ill. Once, when nearly a hundred Chinese applied to be received as probationers upon one and the same day, he was filled with wondering triumph, only to be dashed into the depths again by the discovery that the would-be Christians had all been implicated in a recent riot, and that their desire for conversion had its root in a belief that the influence of the priest might mitigate the punishment which they knew to be due to them. On another occasion, on entering a Chinese Christian's shop, Father Rouellot was horrified to discover a shrine erected to the honour and worship of To Pe Kong hidden away in an inner apartment with propitiatory joss sticks burning before it, despite the fact that the effigy of the Mother of Christ was receiving similar honours in another more conspicuous part of the house. In this case, he had only succeeded in grafting a few additional devils, with foreign names, on to a demonology which was already sufficiently replete. He tore the picture down and stamped upon the faces of the grinning fiends it portrayed, smashed the vases which had stood before it into a thousand fragments, and beat

the owner of the house with his umbrella till he roared with pain and humiliation. Also, on the following Sunday, he preached a devastating sermon about the sin of idolatry that made the queues of his congregation stiffen with horror and dismay. But in the solitude of his hut, in the dead unhappy night, Father Rouellot prayed long and tearfully for the renegades, and humbly besought God's pardon for his own shortcomings; for it seemed to this simple man that the fault must surely lie with him if his flock fell away from righteousness and relapsed into the paganism from which he had hoped to deliver them.

Once he decided to dispense with the services of one of his extra catechists—for, as the congregation grew, his lay staff was proportionately increased—and to devote the money thus saved to the purchase of a pony. It was a little rat of an animal, but, astride its back, Father Rouellot rode forth, like a knight errant of old, to wage war against the Powers of Evil, and to conquer Giant Prejudice and Giant Ignorance. His zeal combined with his increased mobility carried him inadvertently across the boundary of his district into a neighbouring province which was under the charge of an eccentric old priest, who mightily resented this invasion. In his opinion, his junior's action in thus coming a-proselytizing into an area which did not belong to him called for instant rebuke, so he sat down forthwith and wrote a letter to Father Rouellot, the opening sentence of which ran as follows:

“I am only a poor foot-soldier of Christ, whereas you are in the cavalry—*mounted upon your catechist.*”

Poor Father Rouellot! His usually keen sense of humour was unable to come to his assistance upon this occasion. "I have given scandal," he thought miserably; and a text about the sea and a millstone bound about the neck filled him with misgivings and anxiety. The pony was sold, the catechist replaced; and Jean toiled through the sun glare, his *soutane* dingy with dust, footing it bravely as of old, but grievously humbled and chastened.

Faith that never was shaken, even when his converts returned incontinently to the worship of false gods; Hope, doomed too often to bitter disappointment; Charity that was long-suffering and kind, that thought no evil, that bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, endured all things—these were the strands that made up the warp and woof of Father Rouellot's simple life, and the days sped apace, until Jean discovered, almost suddenly, by the aid of stiffening joints and shaking hands, that he had become an old man.

"The floor of the anteroom is nearly crossed now," he said to himself joyfully, and then plodded forth, leaning upon his staff, to do kind acts to those who needed healing of body or of soul, waiting eagerly but with patience for the day that should bring him the reward for which he had laboured so long and so faithfully.

It was toward the end of the merciless hot season of 1896 that "the chilly death"—the cholera—came to Kuâla Lûmut. The earth was parched, and the thirst-racked ground was riven across and across by gaping cracks; the sun smote down with inexorable, calm

malice from out of a brazen sky; and strong men died an ugly death within two hours of the time that the plague had stricken them. Father Rouellot laboured early and late. He carried consolation to the dying; helped to nurse and physic the sick, for the available professional assistance was wholly inadequate to cope with the disease; and throughout that terrible time his grizzled head and lean figure were always to be seen wherever men's needs were sorest. He seemed to bear a charmed life—to pass scatheless where others found certain death; and it was not until after the heavy cloud-banks had opened out and let down their healing torrents that it began to be whispered about amongst us that Father Rouellot was ill. It was not the cholera—only premature old age and exertion too prolonged telling at last upon a frame worn out by many privations and by years of unremitting toil.

Men inquired eagerly of one another how it fared with the Father when they met at the club or on the race course, and some of us took it in turns to sit up with him at night-time. A priest came hurrying from an adjoining district to administer to him the last sacraments of his Church; and he and I and one other were present when death came to Father Rouellot, just as the tropical world was beginning to stir restlessly in its sleep at the whisper of the cool dawn wind.

He had been lying in a semi-comatose state for many hours, now and again reciting a scrap of Latin prayer, mumbling a phrase or two of English, or gurgling out a cluster of uncouth Chinese monosyllables. From long disuse, French had become for him almost a foreign

tongue, yet it was in that language of his infancy, pronounced with the broad accent of the Breton folk, that his last words were uttered. Just before the dawn, he suddenly sat erect, his arms outstretched before him, on his face a wonderful light of happiness and recognition. It was as though he saw at last one whom he dearly loved and from whom he had suffered a long and an agonizing separation.

“*Maman! Ma pauvre maman!*” he cried.

Then a ghost of his old kindly smile returned to his lips while he held up his right hand with the forefinger erect, as though he were calling attention to some sound which to us was inaudible.

“Listen, *maman*,” he cried in a tense whisper. “Listen! ’Tis the heart of our dear Duguesclin that beats anew!”

And with these words he fell back dead into the arms of—an Englishman.

IN THE RUSHING OF MANY WATERS

So farre, so fast the eygre drave,
The heart had hardly time to beat
Before a shallow seething wave
Sobbed in the grasses at oure feet:
The feet had hardly time to flee
Before it brake against the knee,
And all the world was in the sea.

—JEAN INGELow.

ONE morning early in December, in the year of grace 1885, the broad Pêrak River, on the western slope of the Malayan Peninsula, was rolling down in flood. For two days, its waters had been rising steadily, and my boat had sidled its way upstream, hugging the jungle-covered banks, toward which the steersman kept her head pointed, while half-a-dozen squealing Malays propelled her by means of long forked punting poles thrust, as firmly as circumstances rendered possible, into the thick of the vegetation. On each occasion that the poles were withdrawn, the boat would reel and wallow forward, brushing against the outgrowing boughs and shrubs, so that protruding branches forced their way under my palm-leaf shelter, threatening its destruction, scratching my face and hands, as I lay beneath it, and littering my sleeping mat with heaps of sodden trash. Ants and other creeping things had come aboard in their thousands, running

over me with swarms of restless legs. Now and again, one or another of the punters would miss his aim as he prodded at the jungle on the bank, and the resulting lurch would send an even wave tipping over the gunwale. Therefore, everything in the boat was soaking wet, and the physical discomfort of my surroundings had proved to be more than sufficient for my needs.

We made slow and difficult progress, of course, for not only were the means of progression unhandy, but the current was abnormally strong; and as I chanced to be in a hurry, I tied up my boat for the night in a pretty bad temper.

Three times before the dawn broke, we had to shift our moorings, for the waters were rising angrily, and when the daylight came, the river was a good dozen feet above its banks. It was a lovely morning when the sun struggled out of its bedclothes of white mist and rose above the jungle, for the rain that had caused the flood had fallen in the mountains more than a hundred miles away, and here the sky was clear and bright. The great river, red with earth stains, rolled along with here and there a swirling eddy on its surface, marking some submerged snag or rock. Its broad breast was flecked with drift—fragments of a native shanty; a giant tree, uprooted by the flood, whirling helplessly round and round, while the waters played in and out of its spreading branches, to which the green leaves still clung, or rolled it over and over; huge dry logs, which no flood had hitherto succeeded in dragging into the water, riding high as they sagged down-stream; and here and there the carcass of some drowned water buffalo or of a

dead beast of the forest. The river in its bed, flecked throughout its surface by enormous coagulations of foam, like the discoloured froth on a pint pot of ale, purred gently as it rolled along, but on each bank, the water tore through the forest with a rustling, rending sound, punctuated once in a while by the dull splash of a falling tree. And from overhead the sun beat down upon the ruddy flood, which shone dully, but threw back no answering reflection from its sombre depths.

My boatmen sat philosophically chewing quids of betelnut, and gazing placidly at the world of water. Progress in the face of such a freshet was clearly impossible for my large boat, and a dugout with three Malays in it, which whirled down to us from the village below which we were moored, had much ado to avoid being swept past us.

“If this be the likeness of the Male Flood, what will that of the Female be?” ejaculated my head boatman. In common with other Malays, he held the belief that floods, like other animate things, have their mates. The first to come is the Male, and when he has passed upon his way, the Female follows in hot pursuit, after the manner of the sex. He, poor wretch, is only seeking solitude, while she, on the contrary, is bent upon re-joining him. Therefore, her pace is more impetuous than his, and her consequent violence is proportionately more fearful and destructive.

I have said that I was in a hurry—a condition which, in those days, was very unusual with me. The fact was that I had been warned by my Resident, the *de facto* ruler of Pêrak, that he intended to take me with him to

Singapore, whither he was going to spend Christmas and the New Year, and to transact business with the Governor. I knew that his choice had fallen upon me more out of kindness than necessity, and that he would experience no difficulty in filling my place if I remained flood-bound down river. I was at that time, moreover, so well set in my groove—I had been almost alone among my Malays for more than a year—that I was, in a sense, reluctant to put myself out of tune with my life by returning for a few weeks to the local centre of European civilization. I, accordingly, debated within myself whether it was worth while to make the tremendous effort that would be demanded by an attempt to keep my appointment with my chief. I did not realize that my decision was to me, in any way, momentous; yet it so chanced that, if I had not tasted the fleshpots of Singapore in December-January, 1885-86, I should hardly have gone in quest of them the following year, and should thereby have missed an opportunity of being despatched on a special diplomatic mission to the then independent State of Pahang, which proved to be the first real turning point in my official career.

While my morning rice was being cooked, I sat gazing sulkily at the flood, thinking out a plan and wondering whether the attempt to put it into execution would be worth the pains. Walking was out of the question, for all the footpaths in the neighbourhood of the river were completely submerged; but it occurred to me that a small dugout might possibly be made to thread its way through the forest, where the current was broken by the trees, and where the dense underwood was well

below the surface of the water. Accordingly, when our meal had been eaten, I embarked in a dugout with two of my stoutest boatmen, Kûlop and Ngah, taking the steer paddle myself.

We knew that we could not hope to reach Kuâla Kangsar—the headquarters of my district—that day, but we expected to be able to spend the night in one of the many villages with which the banks of the Pêrak River are set in this part of its valley. Accordingly, we did not encumber the dugout with food. A change of clothes for each of us and a mosquito net for me were all the gear we considered necessary, except the tobacco and betel quids which such of us as needed them carried about our persons.

The dugout was the typical Malayan craft of the kind. It was some fifteen feet in length, fashioned from a single log of hard wood, which had first been warped open by fire, and then beautifully modelled by the aid of an adze. It was decked-in throughout its length with laths of bamboo, laid parallel to one another, and bound together by rattan bands; and on this decking we placed our possessions and took our seats, out of reach of the bilge.

Pushing off from my big boat, amid a chorus of "Peace be with you on your journey!" from my people, and answering shouts of "Peace be with you in your tarrying!" from us, we fought our way through the racing water that lined the jungle's edge, and pushed through a tangle of boughs into the forest. Then we headed up-stream, and threaded our path carefully between the close-set trees.

The jungle as I saw it that day has left upon my mind an impression that will never be effaced. It resembled the depths of some enchanted wood such as a magician of the fairy tales might have set about his castle in order to affright would-be intruders upon his solitude. Overhead, the canopy of branches, laced together and interwoven and hung with shaggy parasitic growths, obscured the sunlight and cast about us an even and melancholy gloom. The sodden dankness that ever clings about the forests of the Malay Peninsula was rendered more than ordinarily vault-like by the discoloured waters in which the trees were steeped. This, however, was an aspect of tropical nature which was not altogether strange to me; but this day the trees themselves were unlike any to which my eyes were accustomed. Some were stained an angry red, others glistened with a black sheen, others again wore a dull and lustreless hue quite foreign to vegetable life, and the surfaces of one and all were in restless, agitated motion. At first, I was at a loss to account for these transformations; and for the strange power to move and crawl with which the bark of trunk and bough seemed suddenly to have become endowed. Then I perceived the cause of the change which had been wrought in the forest. Every tree was covered with ants and with other insects of many and strange varieties, seeking shelter from the flood. One tree would be occupied by all the inhabitants of a red-ants' nest, the lanky, long-legged, wasp-waisted creatures crawling unceasingly over one another, trying in many cases to salve the eggs they bore upon their backs, and frequently missing

their foothold, to fall, struggling impotently, into the water beneath. On many trees, fierce battle was being waged between ants from rival nests—horribly methodical and merciless when the combatants belonged to different varieties, one of which had over the other a pronounced advantage; stubborn and long-drawn-out when ants of the same breed were engaged and victory depended merely upon superior numerical strength—but warfare of a quality inexpressibly bloodthirsty and vicious—whereof the ferocity seemed to be emphasized by the absence of all noise and outcry. Here and there a great elephant ant, an inch long, would be seen struggling bravely but helplessly under a load of tiny assailants; or a big, flat wood louse floundered about with half a hundred savage insects gnawing at its back and vitals. Clouds of cockroaches of all shapes, sizes, and degrees of villainy fluttered from the branches against which we brushed, and scampered over our bodies with their loathsome legs.

But the semblance of an enchanted wood was chiefly given by the snakes. The trees seemed full of them. Over and over again as we skirted a trunk, or pushed past a low-hanging bough, a cruel, lozenge-shaped head would dart out at us from among the foliage, with wicked, glistening eyes, and nimble, protruding tongue. The paddles of all three of us were busy, and more than once we had exciting experiences with reptiles which we had knocked into the water, and which seemed to be bent upon boarding the dugout. They all appeared to be able to swim with wonderful speed and dexterity. We could see other snakes coiled up in the

branches overhead, and several fell into the boat or splashed into the water around us during the course of the day. Occasionally, we would turn aside to avoid a water snake wriggling along the surface of the flood, only to find another enemy lurking among the greenstuff into which we had backed. How we escaped being bitten is to me still a mystery.

Scorpions and centipedes, wasps and hornets, which nest in the earth, and almost every kind of stinging and evil-smelling abomination crawled over or fluttered among the trees in which all alike had sought shelter. We killed two large, black, crab-like scorpions in the boat. I was myself stung by a small centipede which fastened on to the back of my neck and occasioned me very severe pain; and at the end of a few hours our skins were raw with the stinging and biting of ants and of other lesser insects.

All that day we pushed on, baling out water and miscellaneous horrors at intervals; and when the night shut down, we found ourselves some miles inland, with a very vague idea of our whereabouts, and no sign of a village in our neighbourhood. Broad patches of ground were here showing above the level of the water, and on one of these we camped for the night. It was all too fully tenanted; supper we had none; and the mosquitoes came in clouds to feast upon us. The sounding slaps which Kûlop and Ngah continuously dealt their bare bodies, as the mosquitoes bit them, disturbed my rest, got upon my nerves, and perhaps excited my sympathy. Anyway, we eventually all three lay down side by side on the sodden earth under my net. My bedfellows

were restless folk and much given to inarticulate vociferation. Moreover, ants and other creepy-crawly things were ubiquitous, so when the dawn came, it found me not only a very hungry, but also a very tired man.

There was no morning meal to detain us while it was being cooked—no fire even over which to linger warming ourselves after the dankness of our comfortless night; so we made an early start, stepping into our dugout, and threading our way once more through the insect-covered and reptile-infested trees. The jungle had been submerged for many hours by now, and the battles between rival armies of ants were mostly ended. Even damaged friends appeared to have been cast into the water, and the congestion of the day before was visibly diminished. Some depressed-looking monkeys sat cowering in the upper branches, showing obvious disapproval of the invasion that had befallen their domain; and here and there the sharp face of a rat peered down at us with quick, curious glances. We were heading inland now, trying to find the edge of the flooded jungle, and, at about 11 A. M., we came to dry ground at last and went ashore, abandoning our dugout.

The forest was not dense in this place, and we forced our way through it with little difficulty. This was just as well, for we had not tasted food for nearly thirty hours, and we had passed a night which had been anything but restful. We said hardly a word to one another, but we plied our wood-knives doggedly and plodded patiently onward. After an hour's tramp, Kûlop, who was leading, suddenly gave vent to a grunt

of dissatisfaction. In front of us, the jungle was once more submerged, and looking through the trees, we could see no end to the stretch of water. I began to understand the meaning of despair. We had come too far inland to think of going back, for we were walking a race against hunger—that grimmest and most sure-footed of competitors.

“*Ālang-kah chělâka nasīb Kîta!*—How accursed is our destiny!” exclaimed Kûlop.

“What is now our stratagem?” I asked.

“Whatever the *Tûan* pleases,” said my two companions miserably.

I spoke a few words to them, and then we all three fell to work, and in a few minutes we had completed the construction of a tiny raft. Next we stripped as nearly naked as Malayan ideas of propriety—the limits of which no stress of circumstances is suffered to overpass—render possible, piled our possessions on the raft, and pushing it before us, waded into the stagnant water. We were soon out of our depths, but, aiding one another, we swam steadily onward with the raft bobbing and rolling in front of us. Ngah was faint for want of food, and we had to make many halts, clinging to the trunks of trees or to overhanging branches for support, before that weary swim was finished. The swamp proved to be about half a mile wide, and we were all more or less exhausted before we succeeded in winning our way across it.

At last, dragging the raft after us, we floundered out of the shallows, three nearly naked men, with here and there a black and shiny band, six inches long, clinging

to our water-puckered skins. These were water leeches, breakfasting happily, and when we had wrenched them from their holds, the blood ran in widening scarlet patches down our wet bodies.

Shivering and chattering with cold, stained with the foul water, raw with the bites and stings of insects, and bleeding in many places, we began to tumble into our clothes. We were profoundly sorry for ourselves. It was now that I discovered that my shoes had disappeared. When or where they had fallen off the raft, we could not say, but they were gone past all hope of recovery. I sawed the legs of my trousers off at the knee with my wood-knife, lest the flapping bottoms should afford too good cover for the jungle leeches, which are smaller than their brethren of the water, but much more numerous and persecuting. For the rest, I was not very badly incommoded. The year before, I had been in charge of a district, a little further south of the Pêrak valley, where the swamp water had some poisonous quality that caused one's feet to swell to an enormous size. During some months, therefore, I had been compelled to do all my jungle walking without the aid of the boots, into which my feet declined to fit, and I had thereby developed such tough soles that I never afterward experienced much difficulty in picking my way barefoot through a Malayan forest.

We struck a footpath now, but twice again we had to cross swamps, though neither of them was as formidable as that which we had already negotiated. Standing on the grassy bank of the last of these, while we plucked a fresh batch of horse leeches from our bleeding limbs,

I saw ahead of me the mountains which divide the Pêrak valley from Lârut. Directly in front of us was Gûnong Ârang Pâra—the Mountain of Soot; and a little behind it rose the summit of Gûnong Bûbu—the Fish Trap—with its triangular peak flanked by the long, flat ridge. I could see each rounded treetop on the mountain-sides, and the government bungalow among the coffee shrubs on the upper slopes of Ârang Pâra. This showed me that we were already a good many miles inland, and I knew that, if we headed straight for the hills, we should sooner or later strike a charcoal burners' track which led along the foot of the mountains to the main highroad upon our right. This thoroughfare joins Kuâla Kangsar to Taiping, the chief city of Lârut, and I calculated that we should hit it at a point distant about five miles from the former place. This gave us hope, and we all three plunged into the jungle, still following our footpath, and made for the hills with renewed energy.

My Malays lagged somewhat, so I pressed on alone. The track had not been recently used, and my wood-knife was constantly needed to enable me to force my way through the thick brushwood. Here and there a monster tree, which in its fall had dragged others to the ground, obstructed the path with a barrier a dozen feet in height, and over these I had to climb laboriously. In places, the faint trail disappeared utterly, and I had to make numerous casts on one side or on the other before I could again find a means of moving forward. It was weary work, and I was faint with hunger, but I pushed on doggedly, and after an incredibly long hour

or two, I came out upon the charcoal burners' path. It had only been cleared sufficiently to allow the slow water buffaloes to drag their clumsy sleds along it, and the passage of many hoofs had stamped the yielding earth into a quagmire. It was bad going for one as leg-weary and famished as I was by this time, and the two miles that separated me from the highroad proved to be nearly too much for me.

At last the welcome streak of yellow—the dusty, metalled, sun-baked road winding through the green walls of jungle on either hand—showed me that civilization was drawing near; and it was with a boundless satisfaction that I presently felt my bare feet treading its flint-set surface. A few hundred yards away, a Chinaman's booth stood by the roadside, and from rattan lines strung across the window there depended numerous clusters of the little yellow bananas, which the Malays name *pîsang lěmah mânis*—"the bananas that are succulent and sweet." Their Chinese owner could speak no known language, so I could not explain my position to him; but when I flung myself at the fruit and devoured the whole of his stock with such greedy appetite, he smiled at me with that air of compassionate benevolence which the eccentricities of "red-headed foreign devils" are wont to arouse in these superior people. His low opinion of me was probably enhanced by the lavish manner in which I paid him for my meal, for the Chinese are a thrifty race and they hold prodigality in just contempt. I, however, was inspired by gratitude rather than by sound business principles, and, indeed, I would have

been ready enough, at that moment, to part with my birthright in exchange for even the least savoury mess of pottage.

Much rested and refreshed by the food and by my short halt, I walked on to a neighbouring village, where I got together some Malays and sent them back, with such cold boiled rice as they could collect, to seek for Kûlop and Ngah. I subsequently learned that they found them lying down, completely exhausted, about half a mile short of the charcoal burners' track.

As soon as the search party had started, I set off to walk into Kuâla Kangsar, and three hours later I once more saw the waters of the Pêrak River. The angry stream rolled down swollen and muddy, measuring nearly half a mile across. The whole of the low-lying part of the township was flooded out, and even in the shops in some of the higher streets the people were camping on the roofs. On the rising ground at the back of the town the Malays were living under all manner of crazy improvised shelters, and the smell of the evening meal, which all were engaged in cooking, fell gratefully upon my nostrils as I threaded my way among the huts and shacks.

Many of my friends were homeless and outcast that day, and taking them all together, they were a bedraggled and woebegone crowd, but my own figure was, perhaps, the most ruffianly of the lot. My broad felt hat was a limp and sodden ruin. My gray flannel shirt was torn down the back from the neckband nearly to the waist, and it hung about me in tatters. My trousers had been sawn off raggedly at the knee, and

my legs and feet were bare. Here and there a patch of dull red showed where the blood from a leech bite had stained my clothes; the dirt of the jungle smeared me from head to foot, and the white dust of the road was caked over all.

Pêrak, as early as 1885, was a peaceful land, from which the tyranny of the knife and the spear had already definitively departed; but so long as nature continues to play her pranks with us, a man may still accumulate some unusual experiences, even in places in which *Pax Britannica* is an idol unbroken.

CAST

I

THE recollection of my earliest impressions concerning him is still fresh in my mind. From the moment of our entry into the troubled land one name—the name of Simon Strange, of “Tûan Streng,” as the natives called him—had been dinned into our ears with insistent reiteration. We were bored to death by the constant repetition. There seemed to be, in all that wilderness, no soul capable of framing a single sentence in which reference to Simon Strange did not occupy a place. The Chiefs who paid us courtly visits of ceremony to assure us of their loyalty to the alien Power for which we stood—a “loyalty,” by the way, which was something curiously like treachery to their own people, and which even the simplest-hearted among us viewed with acute suspicion—invariably introduced themselves as being numbered in the tale of those whom Tûan Streng valued and trusted and loved. This bare and unsupported statement was evidently regarded by them as an all-sufficing certificate of character, and as a sure key to our own respect, confidence, and affection.

At those excruciating interviews to which we were subjected by these local potentates, we groaned in spirit whenever Simon Strange, his opinions, customs, pre-

dilections, actions, words were quoted to us by our visitors. The Chiefs would sit glaring at us in funereal silence for hours at a time, occasionally punctuating the long embarrassing pauses by slow trickles of speech. They emitted their words as grudgingly as drops of water are squeezed from a dry sponge, but as surely as they found voice to speak, so surely did they harp upon the one inevitable topic—Tûan Streng. The village headmen who wandered into camp with long tangled tales upon their lips—the hopeless irrelevancies and the panic-born rumours which these worthy folk dignified by the name of “information”—always called loudly upon Tûan Streng and upon Allah and His Prophet to witness that they did not lie, and wound up their most palpably incredible statements by declaring roundly that if only one or another of the above-mentioned authorities was in camp, their precious news would find instant belief.

All the brown men, women, and children, who straggled in to us from the mysterious unknown forest country that girt us about, began by asking whether Tûan Streng was with us, and expressed their disappointment with undisguised and unflattering frankness when they learned that they were expected to have dealings with our own unworthy selves. Not a few of them, when the absence of the popular hero was made known, declined absolutely to hold any intercourse with meaner folk than he, and retired incontinently into the wilderness which had spewed them forth. One hoary old ruffian, who had as his “tail” a following of some of the most sinister-looking and elaborately armed cut-

throats that I had ever seen, spat on the ground in the most unblushing fashion in token of his disgust when it was suggested to him that he should transfer his allegiance to us as the friends of the absentee. That was not to be thought of, he said. He and Tûan Streng were brothers *dũnia âkhirat*—through time and eternity—a relationship which, I confess, did not move me to envy the unknown Strange. The old fellow also mentioned that his “brother” was not a mere common white man, but a person of distinction, who, moreover, stood possessed of various useful and unusual qualities entitling him to honour. For instance, he was invulnerable, could foretell events, and was in close league with the *Hantu Utan*—the Jungle Demon—a serviceable spirit, it would appear, by whose aid Strange was reputed to be able to cover vast distances on foot in inconceivably short spaces of time. Viewed as samples of local superstition, these fragments of modern folklore might have a certain interest, but, long ere this, I and the other youngsters with the punitive expedition had learned to cherish a deadly hatred of Simon Strange, the man whom none of us had ever met, from out the shadow of whose haunting personality it yet seemed impossible to emerge.

And the thing that irked us most was that the leaders of our expedition appeared to have become the thralls of the prevailing possession. It had been understood among us that we had been hurried up into the district in which we then lay in order to relieve Strange’s stockade, where, with a couple of white men and a handful of Indian soldiers, he had been offering a

stubborn resistance to certain hostile tribes who had maintained a close investment of the position during several precarious weeks. Why, then, we asked, did we not push ahead quickly and give the beggars the licking they were spoiling for? After the manner of our kind, we, the young and ardent members of the expedition, had long ago decided that our leaders were "a pack of old women," and this prolonged inaction proved to us the soundness of our immature judgment. We were obliged to keep our opinions more or less to ourselves, but, none the less, we asked questions. And the answers were always the same. "We must wait for Simon Strange. Strange thinks that the job can be done more thoroughly if we wait till he gets through to us. Simon Strange says that he can keep his end up all right till the cows come home, so there is nothing to be gained by hurrying matters for a bit. We must wait for Simon Strange, or, at any rate, until he gives us the *route*," and much more to a like purpose.

Could anything be more unsatisfactory, galling, or humiliating? Here we were, a big, well-equipped force, within "shouting-distance" (as we termed it) of an insolently rebellious population of Asiatics, kicking our heels in dishonourable inactivity while we calmly awaited the coming of the very man to effect whose rescue we had gone upon the warpath! And here were our leaders—men grown old in native warfare, and childish in our irreverent estimation—hanging fire in this ignoble fashion in order that a mere political officer—a civilian, a *pékin*—might make his way across the danger zone, and be so obliging, if you please, as to

teach us military men how to manage our own particular *pidjin*! Can it be wondered at if young blood and hot heads waxed rebellious, if we grumbled furiously among ourselves, and cursed the unknown Simon by every god in the mythologies?

Looking out upon the enemy's country from the hill-top upon which our camp was pitched, you could see absolutely nothing except the white-hot sky above—empty save for a solitary kite hanging almost motionless in the still air—and a wide expanse of forest, spread before and below us, like a great sea of blues and greens blurred and misty in the heat haze. A big horseshoe range of mountains, their jungle-clad slopes an ethereal azure in the distance, encircled the plain, which here and there was intersected by bold dykes of rolling hill spurs of a deeper tint, those nearest to us resembling giant cauliflowers, since upon their flanks the broken curves of the treetops were clearly visible. Now and again, the intense sunlight flashed upon a half-hidden reach of river, and at eventide, in certain places, thin columns of smoke arose, marking the existence of villages. But the little we could see—this baffling wilderness of forest, hill, and river—represented practically the sum total of our knowledge concerning the country in which we were about to operate; and the enemy against whom we were to be pitted was notoriously cunning, passionately fond of a stolen fight and a merciless ambush, was skilled beyond aught else in woodcraft, and possessed the tremendous advantage of knowing every inch of the ground. All that, to the younger members of our party, gave the expedition its

peculiar fascination. The very difficulties elevated the whole affair into an adventure, a romance. But it was an appreciation of these very facts that gave our seniors pause. On our side we said, "Let us explore. Let us organize our own intelligence department. Let us trust to the almighty luck of the British Army, and lose no time in giving the rebels a lesson." We were wild to plunge headlong into the Unknown, to splash about for ourselves, to pick up our knowledge of the lie of the land, political and geographical, as we went along—as we needed it. The supreme recklessness which is born of the energy and sublime self-confidence of youth was ours. We jibbed violently against the decrees of our more prudent elders; but ever the answer came, "Wait for Simon Strange. Strange knows the country like the palm of his hand. If it is possible for a man to get through to us, Strange will come. We must sit tight and wait for Simon Strange."

Concerning the petty local politics of the region, we were as ignorant as we were of its geography. Few men in Asia bother their heads about the interravel of tribal complications beyond their immediate sphere of action—the intrigues and counter intrigues, the family feuds, jealousies, rivalries, relationships, alliances, the little ignoble incentives which move men to do or leave undone the hundred and one things which, taken together, make up the welter of ugly political passions in which the little native states wallow everlastingly. Least of all do men concern themselves with the personal element which enters so largely into these matters—with the characters of the insignificant chieftains

and their advisers, men who bulk so big in these microscopic worlds. It is known vaguely that it is the business of some one or another to keep his eye glued to such trivialities, so that when, of a sudden, a thorough understanding of them becomes an affair of importance, the wheels of the greatest administration in the world may not be stayed or hindered. But men are none too plentiful in Asia—"the grim stepmother of our kind," who uses up her children all too fast; wherefore such special information is often locked away inside one man's brain, and when the moment comes for utilizing his knowledge, that man, for a little space, becomes that least common of objects, a man who is indispensable. An appreciation of this fact was doubtless in the mind of our leaders, but they did not condescend to enter into explanations with us. They contented themselves with bidding us wait for Simon Strange, vying with the natives, meanwhile, in lauding him as a person of exceptional endowments. We—I use the pronoun to indicate us youngsters, the fiery and untamed but withal impotent mutineers in the camp—were inclined to despise native politics and to think only of the glorious rough-and-tumble that awaited us in the valley below, from which we were withheld in the name of Simon Strange. This was the *alpha* and *omega*, the base and the pinnacle of the edifice of his offending, and the chorus of extravagant praise which white men and natives around us combined to chant in the fellow's honour made us positively sick.

We held an indignation meeting one afternoon, when the game of "tip-and-run," with which we were wont to

solace ourselves during the cool hours before the gloaming, was over. The sun had gone to bed behind the range of western mountains, and the sky was one glory of wonderful crimsons and mauves, with here and there a dash of vivid scarlet, an inlet of ethereal azure, or a delicate streak of opalescent tints. The hills stood out against the brilliant background, looking incredibly close at hand and painted an even Prussian blue; the valley, lighted up by the glow in the heavens, was greener than an emerald; and we hated the whole scene with fierce hatred, because we longed to be up and doing, and the mysterious Simon Strange held us in bondage.

"Old Mark-Time"—this was the nickname by which our commanding officer was irreverently known among us—"talks of the chap as though he was a little tin god," growled one of us.

"For my part, I am full of sympathy with the Athenian citizen who was weary of hearing Aristides called 'the Just,'" said I.

"I am growing sceptical about the fellow's existence," chimed in another youngster. "I believe he's a myth—a sort of official Mrs. Harris. 'I don't believe there's no sich a person!'"

And then, out of the gathering shadows, two tattered scallawags emerged suddenly. "We be men who are of the following of Tûan Streng," said one of them, and from somewhere in the foul rag with which his long, lank hair was bound he produced a soiled and crumpled piece of paper. "This is a letter," he remarked.

"Mrs. Harris has materialized sufficiently to write a letter, anyhow," I said, and we bore the note off to "Old Mark-Time."

He and the Second-in-Command read its blurred pencilling with anxious eyes, and we all hovered around expectant and excited. The letter was not for us, however, and though its arrival was an event, in that it broke the monotony of our life, and proved that Simon Strange was not a mere figment of "Old Mark-Time's" imagination, we were cynically convinced that it would only lead to further maddening delays. In the meantime, we fell to questioning the messengers, and for men who had thought themselves capable of organizing a working intelligence department unaided, the results which we obtained were not inspiring. There could be no doubt as to the loyalty of *these* natives, for they had come through the enemy's country at the risk of their lives. They were ready and anxious to put us in possession of all the information which we needed, but their limitations, and perhaps our own, made this a matter of difficulty. They could tell us, of course, that Strange was still holding out, that there seemed to be a sufficiency of supplies in the beleaguered stockade, and that the country lying between us and our goal was in the hands of the enemy, but when it came to details, we soon found ourselves hopelessly at sea. What in the wide world, we asked one another, was a sane man to gather from such statements as these: that from one place, which we had never heard of, to another, which was altogether unpronounceable, the distance was such that a man, bearing no burden, who started before

the flies were on the wing, would arrive at the hour when the kine go down to water; that two other villages with impossible titles were divided from each other by a distance such as a man might cover during the mastication of a quid of betelnut; that the pools in the main river, which might have to be bridged or forded, were as deep as a basketful of fishing lines uncoiled; that one chief was a "file" and another "a head of wind"; that the forces of the enemy were as numerous as the ears of rice in a field ploughed by one yoke of oxen, or perhaps by one yoke and a half? The two messengers disputed warmly as to the precise reply to be given to each of our questions, and only arrived at answers such as the above after a painstaking effort to insure mathematical accuracy. We laughed feebly, and confessed ourselves beaten. It seemed to us that we had come into a country in which all matters of topography were questions of pure speculation; in which the measurement of distance was altogether arbitrary, depending upon the imagination of the individual, and upon a set of picturesque but meaningless phrases; a land in which arithmetic ceased to be numbered among the exact sciences; in which every practical thing in life had become nebulous, baffling, and unspeakably exasperating. At the mess table that night "Old Mark-Time" and the Second-in-Command were jubilant. They confidently predicted the speedy arrival of Simon Strange, were lavish in their encomiums of his energy, pluck, extraordinarily intimate knowledge of the people and the country, and loud in their self-congratulations, in that they had done wisely to curb a

very natural impatience and to await his coming. We youngsters listened submissively, with our tongues in our cheeks, and now and again exchanging furtive winks; but I think it was beginning to dawn upon some of us that "Old Mark-Time" had been right, and that there is truth in Whewell's saying that we are none of us infallible, not even the youngest.

And then, at last, after a further day or two of waiting, Simon Strange came.

II

The manner of his coming was in this wise. There was no parade that morning, and we were all assembled in the rickety mess hut, eating our *chota hazri*, sitting on empty packing cases, smoking and swapping lies, as was our custom on such occasions. The sentries had reported that the sound of firing had been heard during the night from one or two of the villages lying directly below our hill, and I had been called before the dawn to look at a number of bonfires which had been lighted up and down the valley. We did not know what these things might portend. We were rather shy of jumping to conclusions concerning the meaning of anything in this mysterious country since our humiliating experiences on the evening when we tried to pump the men who had brought in Strange's letter. Still, it looked as though things were moving at last, and we were filled with hope that the enemy had made up his mind to attack us, since we showed no signs of assuming the offensive on our own account. That the rebels would be guilty of an act of madness if they made any

such attempt was of course obvious, but, the wish being father to the thought, we convicted our foemen of insanity quite light-heartedly and with complete satisfaction to ourselves.

While we were discussing this aspect of affairs, suddenly a white man marched into the hut. He was a very tall, fine-run young fellow, broad of shoulder, deep of chest, lithe and active as a cat, and blessed with one of the longest, leanest, and most serviceable pairs of legs that a man ever owned. He wore a big felt hat, a gray flannel shirt, unbuttoned at the neck, and with its sleeves rolled up above the elbow, a broad leather belt, supporting a holstered revolver and countless pouches, a pair of discoloured jungle pants, small anklet gaiters, and light canvas shoes. He was tattered and stained with mud, and he was dripping wet from head to heel. Our attention was chiefly claimed, however, by the burden which he bore upon his back, under the weight of which his square shoulders were bowed. It was wrapped in an old and much-soiled native cloth of many colours, and from it emerged two skinny brown arms which were clamped throttlingly around the white man's throat, and two thin brown shanks which dangled limply one on either side of his hips.

The newcomer stood for an instant framed in the low doorway of the hut, nodded to us casually, said, "Good-morning," as though he had parted from us all on the preceding evening and this meeting was a thing of course, and then, stepping lightly to the only chair which the mess possessed, unshipped his burden skil-

fully, and laid it down very softly in the sag of the canvas. The burden gave vent to a low groan, and some unintelligible words in the vernacular broke from it, and were answered by the stranger in the same tongue. Then we noticed that the stains on the cloth in which the native had been slung were great black patches of blood, and, as we watched, these began to spread impartially over the immaculate canvas of the chair. Now this chair, the property of "Old Mark-Time," was at once the dearest of his possessions and the only thing whose profanation could move that slow man to wrath; yet, wonderful to relate, there was no note of anger in the commanding officer's voice as he started up from his seat at the table and cried, "Strange!"

"How do you do?" said the newcomer, without even looking up from his task of disposing the limbs of his *protégé* in an attitude of greater comfort. "I suppose one of you chaps is a doctor, eh?"

Manwering, our little "Pills," stepped forward.

"Oh, you are a doctor, are you? That's all right. Look here. This fellow of mine has been shot through the thigh. No bones broken or arteries cut, I fancy, but he has had time to get stiff, and is in pretty bad pain. Will you just see what you can do for him?"

Manwering examined the man's wound tentatively without removing the handkerchiefs with which it was bandaged. "We must get him carried to the hospital. Wait a minute and I'll call——"

"That's all right. You show the way," said the newcomer, lifting the man in his arms firmly but very tenderly, and, without sparing us so much as another

look, he carried his patient out of the mess hut at the doctor's heels. It was very pitiful to see the expression with which the injured brown man looked up into the face of the youngster who stooped above him bending slightly under the weight of his burden. The native's eyes had in them just that pathetic trustfulness which is to be seen in the eyes of a dog whose master is trying to do what he can to relieve his sufferings. I think that in that hour I began to understand something of the secret of the power which Simon Strange exercised over the native population of this wilderness, something of the reasons for the devotion which he inspired and of the strong appeal which he made to the imaginations of these primitive people.

"So that is the great Strange!" said one of us when he had disappeared. "He's a pretty substantial myth, anyway."

"Old Mark-Time" was looking rather ruefully at the stains upon the chair canvas, and I fancy that he was not best pleased at the discovery that a wounded native seemed to be more important in the new arrival's eyes than the commanding officer of an expeditionary force. "It looks as though Master Strange had been getting into one of his scrapes," he said disapprovingly, and then we all sat smoking in a silence only fitfully broken until the stranger came back to us.

This he did in a matter of half an hour or so, and, after shaking hands with us all, he settled down steadily to devour an enormous meal. He was quite unabashed by the fact that the change of clothes which Manwering had provided for him was a grotesque misfit in which

any one less utterly devoid of self-consciousness would have been painfully aware of cutting a ridiculous figure before a number of complete strangers. He explained his appetite, which certainly seemed to call for explanation, by saying that he had not touched food for four-and-twenty hours, and he also mentioned casually that he had not tasted bread for eight weeks or seen red meat for nearly a twelvemonth.

"I shall not trouble you, Strange, with any business to-day," "Old Mark-Time" said in his most condescending and pompous manner. "I feel sure that you will require to sleep after your late exertions."

"That's all right, sir," said Strange cheerfully. "You need not bother about me. I'm as fit as a fiddle and game for any amount of work. I shall get all the sleep I need to-night, I dare say."

So, as soon as the meal was over, Simon Strange and the Second-in-Command were closeted with "Old Mark-Time" in the latter's hut, and I was privileged to be present as a sort of secretary. I have very rarely been a spectator of anything that interested me more keenly. The interview lasted the whole of that day, with short breaks only for meals, and was carried on late into the night, and during all that time Simon Strange, alert, instinct with a sort of magnetic energy, a perennial spring of accurate and curious information about the country and the natives, at one moment acutely critical, at another startlingly suggestive and original, and always just a little humorous, inspired, guided, and controlled the decisions of the two older men. He not only had a quite unholy knowledge of

this wilderness which spread around us, but he also possessed a queer knack of making those who heard him share his understanding of political questions, details of topography, and the hundred and one other points which must mould our plans for us. Up to the time of his coming, we had been enveloped in a perfect mist of uncertainty and mystery; at the end of that day, I, for one, felt that I knew more about the troubled land than about any other place on earth. And his body and his brain alike appeared to be tireless. More than once I detected "Old Mark-Time" in a feeble attempt to break out of school, and I thought that the Second-in-Command was not unwilling to aid him, but Strange kept the noses of the pair of them fixed to the grindstone, and dinned into their ears the necessity of acting promptly now that the time for action had arrived. Even I found myself getting weary of sitting in a stuffy hut, yet we, who had been in camp all these days, had come to the council board fresh from restful nights and hours of ease, whereas Strange had barely finished a terrific tramp over hill and dale, and had certainly spent at least one night out of bed and on his feet. I was already enormously impressed by the force of the man, by the effortless fashion in which he seemed to dominate us, by his boundless powers of work, physical or mental, and by his extreme reticence concerning himself and his own experience and exploits.

When at a late hour Strange rose up, stretched himself elaborately, and said that he thought that we were now in a position to begin practical work—doing, not talking—on the morrow, I heard "Old Mark-Time"

sigh with satisfaction, and I watched him toddle off to his sleeping mat with the air of one who is quite played out. Strange bade us good-night and went away to a neat shanty which some natives had rigged up for him—natives seemed in this country to spring up out of the ground to serve Simon Strange—and as the Second-in-Command and I walked up and down, smoking our pipes in the moonlight before turning in, we could see him sitting cross-legged under the low thatching of the roof talking to a succession of brown-skinned men. Each of these had come many miles, and had awaited patiently for hours the opportunity of pouring his information or his troubles into the ears of Tûan Streng. In the dull glare of the hurricane lamp, swinging from a rafter above his head, Strange's face showed pale and worn. The sun tan on cheeks and forehead, arms and neck, which by day gave him an air of health, showed now only as a sickly pallor; the lines around his blue-gray eyes and about his firm, straight mouth seemed to be furrowed deeply; his erect figure looked, for the moment, almost bowed.

"Well, what do you think of him? He's a glutton for work, isn't he?" said the Second-in-Command. Before I could reply, we were joined by Manwering, the doctor.

"I see that Strange has let you out at last, sir," he said to my companion, "though he is still at it himself. I wonder what that fellow's made of! When you remember that this is a tropical climate, it fairly takes your breath away to think of the amount of work the

man asks of himself. Now, just take all that he has been through since he left his stockade. That wounded nigger he brought in has been talking to my dressers, and they have passed the yarn on to me. Strange would not take an escort with him, it seems, partly because he thought he would have a better chance of slipping through the enemy's country if he went almost alone, and partly because he couldn't afford to reduce the little force which is holding on to the stockade. Accordingly, he set out by himself, unless you count the native who tells the story. The rebels were posted all round the stockade, but Strange crawled through their camps during the dark hours before the dawn, and lay up in a clump of jungle for the day. It poured with rain the whole time, the native says, and he and Strange had to lie out and get soaked. As soon as it was dark, they got under way again, and trudged along villainous jungle paths till the dawn found them in the heart of the enemy's country and about thirty miles distant from any of their friends. Here they lay up in the forest for the day, but the native had managed to drop the bundle which contained their store of food, so they had nothing to eat, and again the rain poured and poured. It must have been the very devil, you know—drenched to the skin for more than seventy hours, a tramp by night over thirty miles of infamous jungle, every tree and bush of which might harbour an enemy with a rifle, and neither food nor drink at the end of it all, but just a "lie off" in the pelting rain! Enough to kill any man in any climate, let alone the tropics. It

makes my professional hair stand on end to think of it, and the beggar hasn't even the grace to have fever or to behave as though he were tired out!

"However, that's not all. When dark came, they started forward again, with another thirty-mile tramp ahead of them before they could reach us, some hills to climb, and the real strongholds of the enemy to avoid. They must have been pretty sorry for themselves, I should think—fagged and starving and soaking wet, and with their very lives depending upon their not breaking down—and the native, judging from what he says, felt that they were in a precious tight place and had not got the spirit of a louse left in him, but just kept on keeping on because Strange had hold of the soul of him and wouldn't let go—at least, that's how he puts it. Well, they got through the first five-and-twenty miles of their march somehow, leg-slogging through the darkness, swarming up hills that had a cant on them like the pitch of a thatched roof, and sliding down the other side into the valleys to wade knee-deep through bogs and slush, and to lose themselves in the dense mists rising from the plain. It must have been a beast of a journey through that broken country among the spurs of the foothills, and the native could never have done it, he says, if Strange hadn't just *made* him hang on and not give in. They came by a short cut, it seems, because though there was a safer way it would have taken them a long tramp round, and Strange thought the native wasn't up to the extra exertion. Anyhow, the route they took led them straight through a cluster of villages in which the enemy was strongly posted.

They made their way past five or six of the villages without mishap, with their hearts more or less in their mouths, and one eye cocked on the closed houses, and the other glued to the east, fearing every moment to see the dawn creeping up and giving them away. Then, as bad luck would have it, they ran right into a couple of men who were coming up from taking an early morning dip in the river, and a minute later the whole place was humming around them like a disturbed beehive.

"Strange broke into a double, but the native was too done to follow suit, and as soon as Strange saw it he slowed down and waited for him. There was a good deal of promiscuous firing going on, not aimed at anything in particular, but helping to spread the alarm, and presently beacons began to spring up on all the nearest hills to warn the valley that Strange was trying to make his way through."

"Those must have been the bonfires I saw this morning," I said.

"The next thing that happened was that they were pursued in force by the men in the village which they had last traversed, and Strange, dragging the native after him, plunged into the jungle. If he had been alone, he could have given them the slip easy enough, but the nigger handicapped him, and he never seems to have even thought of letting the poor devil take his chance. From what I can learn, the nigger would have been glad enough to be left to die in peace. He says that he was so fagged that he did not want to live, and he says he can remember trying to explain this to Strange, as well as his sobbing breath would let him,

and getting nothing but a severe shaking for answer. Well, they seemed to have ploughed along like this for a time—for whole æons of time, the nigger says—and then they knocked up against a little band of the enemy which was out after them. They received a volley before they could duck behind some fallen trees, and a bullet hit the nigger in the thigh. Then, he says, he was almost glad—he didn't feel any pain at the moment, but was conscious of the warm blood trickling down his leg—and now he thought that Strange would let him give in. He lay as still as a mouse, and Strange fired the whole magazine of his Winchester at the rebels, and then snatched up the other repeating rifle with which the native had been armed. He must have made some pretty shooting, the native thinks, for the party of rebels drew off, shouting war cries, but evidently having had their bellyful of fighting for the moment. Then the nigger begged Strange to leave him to die in peace and quietude; but no such luck. Strange bound up his wound, rolled him in his waistcloth, and humped him up on to his back—a precious tough job, I should say, for a man who had already been through such a frightful time of hardship and exertion—and after that the native knows very little more except that he thought the journey would never end, and that Strange seemed to be everlastingly splashing up beastly little streams, or forcing his way through scrub and underwood. Of course, he did not dare make use of any proper paths, and if he had not known the country quite marvellously well, he never could have struck our camp. Still, he did strike it, as we know, saved his worthy nigger, and

has himself been working like a trooper ever since. The man must be made of iron!"

"Or grit," said the Second-in-Command. "If he had been in the Service he would have been given the V. C. As it is, I don't suppose it will even be reported, except by old Stubbins" (Stubbins was "Old Mark-Time's" rightful name), "and he has not the gift of expressing himself; so I doubt whether his dispatches are read as carefully as they ought to be."

"What a shame it seems," I said, with all the ready indignation of my years. "It was a splendid thing, not only to have done, but to have been able to do!"

"Splendid enough," said Manwering; "but what chiefly appeals to me is the extraordinary strength and vitality which make such a thing possible. The fellow is phenomenal—absolutely phenomenal—wrought of cast-iron within and without, compact of force and energy. Fancy going through an experience like that, with all its accompanying strain on mind as well as body, carrying a man—even a small man like the nigger—for a matter of five miles after a tramp of nearly sixty, half of which was done on an empty stomach, and in this climate, and then to come in at the end of it all apparently as fresh as paint! I tell you that the thing is colossal, but it can't last. The fellow is drawing gigantic checks upon his constitution, and one of these fine days Nature will foreclose, and call upon him to stump up the overdraft. You mark my words."

It is not my intention to relate the details of the nine months' campaign which followed, but during the whole of that strenuous time Simon Strange did the work of a

dozen ordinary men. It was not that he made unnecessary work, or that he kept a pack of dogs but preferred to do the barking himself. On the contrary, he had a wonderful gift for making others "pull up to the collar," as he called it, and his energy was infectious. It so happened, however, that the circumstances in which we were placed, the magnificent ignorance of the country and the people that was our^y, threw a heavy burden on his shoulders which none other might bear. Our force was soon divided up into half-a-dozen tiny columns, all more or less groping in the dark, and Strange was the inspiring genius of each one of them. He was eternally dropping down into camp out of the skies, and immediately all was hurry and bustle, and quick movements were followed by some small but, in its way, decisive bit of work. He passed ceaselessly from column to column, always carrying his life more or less in his hand as he went on foot without escort from one party of our people to another, bringing in the information lacking which we were paralyzed, organizing our transport and commissariat for us, beating up supplies and coolies from out of a seemingly deserted countryside, initiating and almost dictating the strategy which we employed against the enemy, and all the while carrying on his own "political" work, and settling up the districts and their government as fast as we reduced them to order. He had one or two civilian youngsters to aid him—men who were a sort of rough understudies of himself—but the lion's share of all the work to be done fell to his lot, and we military officers never felt much confidence in anything unless we had Simon

Strange's warranty for it. He toiled like a demon, never spared or saved himself, never appeared to be harassed or overdriven, was always quite calm and happy, and was invariably in the mood for more work. We with the columns were often at rest for days and weeks together, but his labours never seemed to suffer from even a momentary break. He was altogether indifferent to such needs as food or sleep, eating what and when the opportunity offered, or going without for long hours at a stretch with complete good humour, and sleeping on the ground in the rain, or not at all, just as the work to be done rendered necessary or inevitable. The prejudice which had been born in our minds of the native rumours which preceded his coming amongst us had died out from the first moment of his arrival. His was a figure to appeal strongly to the imaginations of young and enthusiastic men, and very speedily we youngsters were the veriest hero worshippers, and Simon Strange, with his force, his strength, his splendid courage, his abnormal power for work, his simplicity, unconsciousness of self, and complete lack of anything resembling "side," was our idol.

At the end of the nine months of fitful fighting, marching and counter marching, attacking and destroying villages, ambushing and being ambushed, the rebels were crushed, and our force was withdrawn, Simon Strange being left behind to bring peace and plenty back into the stricken valleys. He bore us company as far as the top of the range which formed his boundary, "to see us off the premises," as he said, and while our long, snake-like column wriggled down the hillside,

en route for civilization, comfort, and good victuals at last, I took one look back from my position with the rear guard at the man whom we were leaving in the wilderness.

In fancy, I can see him now as he then appeared to me—a big, lean figure silhouetted against the clear skyline, clad in rough garments, with a group of natives squatting humbly around him—the incarnation, as it were, of England's calm, paternal, unostentatious sovereignty over a savage people in a distant land. He was gazing after us, a little wistfully, perhaps; for were we not marching back to the good things of this world, leaving him to the utter loneliness of his life, to the hard, dull, exacting labour of reconstruction that must ever follow upon the excitement and turmoil of warfare? Also, the hardships and privations that, even in the milder form in which we had endured them, had been to us an exceptional and not too acceptable experience, though ended for us, were still for him the natural conditions of existence.

"Poor devil!" said the man at my side. "I wouldn't be in his shoes for something, *planté là* in the heart of the wilderness, and the biggest bit of his work still to do, without even the thrill of excitement to aid him."

“Government looks to its men to take on pretty large contracts out here,” I said; “and the queer thing is that England breeds boys who simply revel in such jobs and are quite content with grub wages. Simon Strange is not exactly expensive at five hundred a year; and I don't suppose they give him a penny more, if as much.”

“It is cheap—dirt cheap,” said my friend, “seeing

that it is the price of a man's body, of the best years of his life, and a precious big slice of his soul thrown in." And then we fell to talking, in joyful anticipation, of the delights of the civilization that awaited us, for which our appetites had been sharpened by our nine months' campaign. Yet, during that time, our life, if compared with that to which Strange was doomed in seeming perpetuity, had been almost easeful and luxurious.

III

After that, I almost entirely lost count of the doings of Simon Strange. Duty carried me far afield, and the very land where I had met the man, in which I had seen my first campaign, had become a dim and distant memory. New scenes, new interests, bigger politics, drove the thought of that little glimpse of the wilderness and of the solitary Englishman who was therein the dominant figure into the background of my mind; but occasionally some chance echo of news came to me, telling of peace and plenty duly restored to the troubled land, and of a thriving peasantry lounging away their lives contentedly under British rule, or under Simon Strange, its local incarnation. But as the years sped onward, my memory recurred less and less frequently to the incidents of those half-forgotten days and to that lonely figure which I had last seen standing outlined against the white-hot Eastern sky.

I was back in London—back from the ends of all the earth—thrilling with the intoxication of delight which none save the exile knows who finds himself after many wanderings in "the only place in the world"—the great,

throbbing, tumultuous, strenuously pulsing heart of the Empire! The roar and rumble of the traffic, the gruff street cries and murmured English speech, the hum of a life, restless, animated, instinct with energy and vitality, made music in my ears that gladdened me. I was possessed by a tingling sensation of excitement: I had no need of occupation to complete my sense of well-being. It was enough just to exist consciously in the midst of the things for which in banishment I had pined, to drink in greedily new impressions of objects old and familiar, to revel in the bare fact that I was once again in the Mecca of my dreams. Therefore, as I walked up Piccadilly that sunny morning, my feet were on the flags, but my head was soaring among the clouds of heaven, and thus I stepped heavily upon the varnished toes of a dapper little man, who forthwith let fly a volley of choice Hindustani expletives. Stopping to apologize for the injury which I had inflicted, I recognized Manwering, the little doctor who had been attached to our column in Simon Strange's country, and following the custom of the East, I bade him drink with me, and led him into my club, which was near at hand.

For the best part of an hour, we sat talking as exiles are wont to talk when they meet far from the land of their banishment, recalling past times which we had spent in company, memories which we shared, and the figures of men whom we had known under alien skies, the reality of whose existence somehow seemed a thing made shadowy by distance.

"You remember Strange—Simon Strange?" asked Manwering presently. "Well, he's at home—at home

for good, I'm afraid. You ought to go and see him. I can give you his address."

"Has he chucked the Service?" I inquired.

"It has chucked him, poor devil. You remember that evening after he first came into camp, lugging that wounded nigger with him, and what I said then? Well, I was a true prophet of evil. He was drawing thundering big checks on his constitution in a villainous climate, and now Nature is calling in the overdraft. Go and see him. It don't bear talking about."

So, later, I travelled down to a dreary suburb of this great sprawling city—a cheap and nasty suburb, humdrum and commonplace, a dead level of struggling, poverty-ridden respectability and dulness—there to seek out Simon Strange, the man who of old had played the *rôle* of destiny to a wide countryside. I saw his mother first, a sweet-faced, faded woman, with kind, sad eyes, and the lines of a lifelong anxiety upon her delicate cheeks and brow. The dingy little house was eloquent of lack of means; the dress Mrs. Strange wore was itself a testimony to the sleepless vigilance which tries so vainly to make sixpence go as far as half-a-crown; the shadow of a terribly straitened income hovered over the place like an oppressive cloud. There was no pretence, no trace of false shame; only the poverty was there, obvious, undeniable, crippling, emphasizing the dreariness and the monotony of a narrow life.

"It is so good of you to come to see Simon," said Mrs. Strange. "It will cheer him up a little. He is wonderfully brave about it all, and he says little enough, but it is breaking his heart."

"I have heard no details," I said. "They tell me that he has left the Service. Is that so?"

"Yes," she sighed. "His health has completely broken down. The doctors declare that he will never be really well again, and that it is out of the question that he should ever go back to the East. He has been retired on pension—a very tiny pension, of course, for he had only served just over twelve years."

"Seventeen sixtieths of a microscopic salary," I mentally calculated. "A piteously inadequate price for which to barter away one's health and all the joy of life!"

"The Government has done its very best for him," Mrs. Strange was saying. "They have written all manner of nice things about him and his work in the past—but, alas! it is the present, and still more the future, that troubles me for him. You see, he was devoted heart and soul to the people and the country and the work; they were his one interest—his life. And now it is all at an end. It is hard for a man to see his life brought to a close so early, yet that is what it means to him. You see, he is only three-and-thirty, and a man finds it difficult to say 'good-bye' to his ambitions so very soon. But this won't do at all," she added quickly, with a brave smile; "I shall only depress you by my grumblings, and I want you to cheer my poor boy up."

She rose and led the way to her son's room, where she left me alone with Simon Strange.

I question whether I should have known him for the man who still lived in my memory—the fierce toiler

with body and mind, the fellow who had borne the reputation of being "as hard as nails," of having an exhaustless fund of physical strength and mental energy. He was seated in a big armchair, cowering over the fire, though the day was warm. His frame, always lean, was now woefully shrunken and fallen together; his skin was dry and was suffused by a sickly yellow pallor; his eyes, deeply sunken in their sockets, beneath which dark discoloured patches showed like bruises, wore a strained and weary look. His voice, of old so firm and masterful, was thin, and it sounded as though it came from a great distance, but his face lighted up with something of the old humorous smile as he stretched out his hand in greeting.

"Awfully good of you to come, old man," he said. "You behold in me the miserable remains of an ill-spent life. I have been busy trying to pick up the broken bits for months, but it takes a lot of doing. I am still only fit for the knacker's yard, and yet I *must* get well soon. I hate being a log, and we want grist for the mill badly. It is terribly rough on the poor old *mater*. This smash-up of mine has been a dreadful blow to her, poor dear."

I sat down, and we fell to talking about old times. For a minute or two, Simon leaned forward and spoke with much of the fire and eager interest that had been wont to mark his utterance, but very soon he threw himself back in his chair with something like a groan.

"It does not do to think about it all," he said; "it only gives me the 'go-fever,' and I shouldn't be worth my salt if I was out there again with my health like this. I

don't think even you can understand what a humiliation going *phut* in this fashion has been to me. Until my constitution turned dog on me, I used to fancy that it was made of cast iron, and I suppose that I didn't give it much of a chance, but you know how it was—there was the work. It had to be put through somehow, and one hadn't much time to bother about anything else.

“Do? What do I mean to do? Get well first, and then look about for a job. A man at the office tried to comfort me by saying that I must have made friends with some local merchants out in the East, and that, perhaps, if I threw myself upon their charity, they might find me a billet as a clerk in one of their London houses. He meant well, poor little snuffy beggar, and I shall act on his advice as soon as I am fit enough, but it isn't exactly a cheerful prospect, is it? Don't think that I am an ass, or that I am too grand to take any work that any one may be kind enough to offer me. It isn't that, only—well, you see the little chap who gave that advice has been nailed to a stool all his life; he had never got a glimpse of anything bigger than a bundle of fusty papers in a grimy office. Of course, he didn't understand—how should he? But the sort of life that I have lived doesn't fit one well for the dull grind he seemed to think so attractive. You see, I have wielded power over men—lots of men; and I have been used to as much responsibility as a fellow knew what to do with. That's it—power and responsibility! The two combined make a strong drink which, once tasted, you cannot do without. Over here, very few ever try a

sip of it, so they don't crave for it, but we who have had our fill time and again find all other drinks insipid. Don't think me an ass. You know something of the life, and I expect you understand."

I did not think him an ass, and I did understand. The talk shifted to other, more cheerful subjects, but it always wore its way back to the same point—to the past and all that life had held for Simon Strange, the all that it could never hold for him again. His memories tortured him, but they would recur insistently. He had been all his life what in the East we call "a doer," but his days for doing were ended; he had been the Providence, omniscient, almighty yet visible, of a whole countryside—he who for the future was doomed to utter impotence. He had delighted in personal power and the stimulating burden of responsibility, not for the satisfaction of his individual ambitions, I fancy, but for the keen interest which they brought him, for the good which they enabled him to effect. Now, at best, if his enfeebled health allowed, he might look forward to monotonous days passed in the dull drudgery of a city clerkship, bending all his splendid energies to the task of trying to preserve himself and those who were dear to him from the pinch of a degrading poverty. Later, I learned that there had been a girl whom poor Simon had hoped to make his wife—a girl for whose sake, perhaps, much of his best work had been secretly done—but broken health and straitened means forbade all dreams of marriage.

Though he was so pitifully worn and aged, he was still young enough for the future to spread away before him

in a seeming eternity, blank, hopeless, dreary, interminable! It was nobody's fault. The Government had done its part and had written handsome letters. The performance of its proper functions would be impossible were it to concern itself too nearly with all the personal tragedies of its servants. Simon, too, was blameless. The work, as he had said, was work that had had to be done, and it was only evil fortune that caused the price to be so heavy, and made it fall all, all upon him.

I did my best to "cheer him up," though I knew that the thing was irremediable, and he strove to help me to illusion. He kept a stiff upper lip turned toward his trouble, and spoke of his fate as a derelict, one "cast" for decrepitude, with a grim humour that I found more pathetic than tears.

I took my leave and was whirled back to London, bearing with me the memory of a brave woman and her brave son, and admiring the "grit" of the latter more that day than ever I had done in the time of his achievements and success.

The great roaring city greeted me—the heart of that Empire which makes and breaks so many things; but it seemed to me now less human and more mercilessly mechanical than ever before, the great mainspring, as it were, of some vast engine which works gigantically, successfully, but with a wanton prodigality of materials and tools. In common with most Englishmen who have travelled widely and have marked things for themselves with a seeing eye, I hold that the British Empire is the mightiest agent for good that God in His infinite wisdom has ever brought into being in this His world; but my

heart was heavy within me as I thought of the obscure litter heaps whereon, neglected and forgotten, are thrown aside the broken instruments which, having served their turn, are suffered to crumble away into inglorious dust.

A TIGHT PLACE

THEY were sinking the fifth big cylinder of the Periyakulum railway bridge when Bruce, the engineer in charge of the job, passed the word shoreward that he stood in need of divers.

The cylinder—a great iron tube, twelve feet in diameter, coated inside with a layer of solid concrete a dozen inches thick, and bolted together in lengths of eight feet each—had already sunk down through the mud and ooze of the river bed to a depth of more than five fathoms below the water level. For days the heavy grab had been busy plunging down through the cylinder into the soft bottom, grasping huge mouthfuls of dirt in its steel jaws, lifting them clear, and dropping them overboard; and all the time the big metal and concrete pipe, held erect by stays and scaffolding, had subsided slowly, inch by inch, into the slime. But now, though nearly a hundred tons of rails had been stacked, spillikin fashion, across the mouth of the cylinder to add artificially to its already tremendous weight, it could not be induced to budge. Hard bottom of a sort had been struck, but at too shallow a depth to satisfy Bruce as to its permanency. He knew from the borings that the cylinder must be sunk through this stratum and another layer of mud before the bed rock below would be finally reached.

After a short delay, two of the divers, Bunny Fitch and Tom Mair, came off in a dugout.

They belonged to a class by no means numerous in the East—white men who perform hard manual labour for a wage; but they were further distinguished from the majority of their fellow workers by the fact that the craft they plied is one which, even in temperate latitudes, must be reckoned among the dangerous and unhealthy trades. East or West, the element of danger remains more or less constant; but in a tropical climate, the unhealthiness, discomfort, and strain of a diver's work are raised to the power of *n*.

Fitch and Mair had worked together as mates for the best part of a decade, travelling up and down the world from one engineering job to another; varying the monotony by doing a spell of salvage work here and there on sea bottoms that were like gigantic artificial aquaria; or by putting in time at some garish tropical seaport, where they groped their way among the mooring-buoy anchors in the fouled waters of the harbour.

They were not only mates, but pals—close pals, as men who live and work together in fair weather and rough are bound to become if the enforced comradeship does not breed sheer, unreasoning hatred.

Fitch was a big, heavy fellow, slow in his movements and his thoughts, steady as a rock, and grudging of his few words. He had saved a good part of his pay, month in and month out, more because he had never contracted the habit of spending money than because he cherished any ultimate ambition which his slow economies were designed to gratify. He drank spar-

ingly and never touched tobacco, not even when the eye flies made life well-nigh unendurable to a non-smoker. He was reputed never to have been in love, nor to have so much as looked sideways at a woman.

Mair, on the other hand, was a short, dark, wiry little fellow, marvellously strong for his inches, active as a cat, and as volatile as a drop of quicksilver. His black hair grew low down upon his forehead, and his wide mouth and blunt features had in them the energy of a bull-terrier and the vivacity of a London street Arab. He had little vice in him, but much intemperate wickedness, bred of high spirits and an overflowing vitality which sought blindly and crudely for some means of self-expression. His pleasures were few and primitive, and he wallowed in them shamelessly when the opportunity served. Fitch, panting in his wake, sought clumsily to mother and chaperon him. He had nursed him through bouts of fever and other ills, had shielded him frequently from the logical consequences of his manifold evildoings, and had got him out of more scrapes than either cared to count.

"There's no booking-off for me," Fitch used to grumble to himself. "Not when Tom's about. It's a twenty-four hours' shift all the time, and hard at that."

Yet he took a certain vicarious pride in the other's excesses—things for which he himself had no taste; laughed with grim, slow appreciation of his mate's quickness, cunning, and ingenuity; and respected him as the better craftsman of the two. Much of their work was necessarily done in pitch darkness, the sense of touch, not the sense of sight, alone guiding them; but

Mair seemed to carry an eye at the end of each nimble finger-tip. Working blindly with chisel and hammer under water, he wrought as surely and almost as quickly as if he were performing his task unhampered. Fitch knew himself to be a good, careful, and skilled workman, but he knew also that, for all his plodding steadiness, he was a child beside his small, mercurial mate, who could do more in a four hours' shift than he could accomplish in a shift and a half.

Arrived at the wooden staging, the two divers prepared for business. They cast aside their overcoats, kicked off their shoes, and stood revealed clad in the thick worsted sweaters, drawers, and stockings which divers always affect. Such wear for a tropical climate was appallingly heavy and warm, and both men were already sweating freely. When inside the diving dress, the temperature of the air they breathed would soon run up to well over 90° F., in spite of the water coolers on the air pumps, and their work would be done in an atmosphere resembling that of the hot room in a Turkish bath. They would, of course, be unable to wipe their faces or bodies, and while the worsted cloth would absorb most of the moisture from the latter, the red head cap of the same material, which Bunny Fitch now proceeded to put on and to pull low down over his eyebrows, was designed to keep, at any rate, some of the perspiration out of his eyes.

With Mair's help, he got into his diving dress, fixed his helmet, and opened the valve. Lifting his leaden-soled feet painfully, he began to descend into the cylinder. With his strange globular headpiece, ungainly

bulk, and slow movements, he resembled a gigantic automaton worked by reluctant and ineffectual clock-work. His bare hands, red and slightly congested by the tight rubber bands about the wrists, alone retained the mobility which we associate with the alert vitality of man. Presently, the muddy waters closed over him, and a little later the air pipe ceased to pay out. He had reached bottom, and the ladder was withdrawn to give him more room in which to move and work.

One and the best part of a second hour crept by, and Tom Mair, his back resting against the side of the cylinder, sat smoking his pipe on the staging above water level, while his invisible mate toiled silently nearly forty feet below him. Mair's duty was merely to stand by on the chance of his mate needing his assistance. The space at the bottom of the cylinder, where Bunny Fitch was slowly chipping away the rock round the edges with chisel and hammer, was too confined to admit of more than one man working there at a time.

The hour was near midday, and the sun, soaring high in the heavens, was a white-hot disc upon which the eye could not rest for more than a fraction of a second. The sky was white-hot, too—colourless, yet vivid with heat. The slow waters of the river, purring around the stays and staging piles, refracted the sun rays with a blinding intensity. There was not a square inch of shade anywhere, and the palmyra palms on the river banks, standing ankle deep in rank, parched underwood, lifted ragged clusters of fronds that stiffened and crackled in the dry and quivering atmosphere. Bruce and most of the coolies had gone to attend to

work on one of the neighbouring cylinders. Mair could see the former moving about the staging only in a big sun hat, a flannel jumper, and a pair of canvas shorts. Even at that distance, his face and his bare arms and legs showed black where the sun had tanned them to the hue of confluent freckles. Mair was alone, save for the linesman—Fitch's only remaining link with the outside world—and the two Tamil coolies who had charge of the air pump.

Even through his thick sweater, the metal of the cylinder, against which his shoulders rested, was almost unbearably hot. The sweat had dried on his face, and he could feel his eyebrows stiffening and lifting as the last minute drop of moisture was sucked out of each separate hair. The sun smote down upon him mercilessly. The refracted heat from the river struck upward with even greater intensity under the brim of his sun hat. It seemed to him that, beaten upon by the breath of two raging furnaces, he was being slowly grilled alive. The heat was something which had to be endured actively and consciously, like pain. Sleep, in such circumstances, was an impossibility. The brain, though cruelly alive, seemed to have become fused into a vapour too volatile for thought, and capable only of registering impressions. Every sense was dazed and reeling, yet combining with every other to appreciate the intensity of their collective suffering. Even blasphemy—Tom Mair's most ready outlet for emotion of any kind—proved comfortless. He could only sit and gasp, like the dusty crows perching with gaping beaks on the fronds of the palmyra palms.

Then, suddenly, something happened. Mair at first failed to realize what that something was; but, an instant later, it flashed upon him that the cylinder had sunk abruptly and rapidly a matter of, it might be, a couple of feet, and then as abruptly had stopped.

He leaped to his feet and craned over the edge. The circle of muddy water within the great iron ring was strangely agitated, its surface disturbed by swirling eddies which lapped wave-like against the sides.

At the same moment came a signal from Fitch—a signal of distress—and the linesman gave tongue lustily.

Mair, already feeling for his diving dress, sent a thin cry through the immensity of the burning daylight, calling frenziedly upon Bruce. He hardly knew, and Bruce barely heeded, the words he used. The tone of his reiterated outcry was sufficient in itself to awaken dismay; and in a few minutes Bruce and a party of his coolies were racing toward him in a dugout.

“Here! Help me into these darned things!” Muir cried in high excitement, fumbling the while with his diving dress. “My mate’s in trouble. What sort of trouble? Gawd knows! Careful with that ladder. No. Better let me go down without it. You may do him a hurt. The cylinder sunk—sunk sudden-like. He signalled for me. Twice he signalled. No. He ain’t signalling now. Hold on, old mate, I’m coming.”

Then, still calling encouragement to Fitch, oblivious of the fact that the latter was out of earshot, he clapped on his helmet over his red cap, and his voice died away in a sort of sobbing murmur.

Bruce and the coolies helped him over the edge of the

cylinder, and he sank rapidly from sight, engulfed by the muddy water.

Bruce stood looking downward, vainly straining his eyes to pierce the opacity of the surface, and speculating in an agony of suspense as to the nature of the tragedy which was hidden from him by those jostling waters. The coolies crowded together, exchanging furtive whispers and fearful glances. In the tense stillness of the noontide, over land and water the heat haze danced like a company of mocking wraiths, as though it shared with this little knot of waiting men the restless anxiety which thrilled them.

Tom Mair sank downward through the water in the cylinder; watched the wavelets wash against the eyeglasses of his helmet, and the light become obscured, fade, and disappear. He was now in dead darkness, and only his outstretched hands, touching the concrete walls to right and left, and thereby guiding and steadying his descent, kept him in contact with the outside world against which his diving dress hermetically sealed him. Henceforth, until he regained the surface, he had the use of only one sense—the sense of touch. For the rest, he was blind, deaf, and dumb.

He felt his right foot touch presently a loosely packed heap of stones; slither on it, and come to rest against the side of the cylinder. Almost simultaneously his left foot found a resting place, and stooping quickly with groping hands outstretched, he discovered that it was planted upon the prostrate body of his mate. This filled him with astonishment, and his first thought

was that Bunny Fitch had fainted. He began to close the valve in the latter's helmet, so that the inflated dress might make him buoyant and easy to carry upward to the surface; but immediately a hand—Bunny Fitch's left hand—flew to his, grasped it, and resisted it passionately. He at once left the valve alone. Then he took up a standing position straddle-legged across his friend's recumbent body, and began rapidly running his fingers over it.

The whole of the bottom of the cylinder to a depth of nearly three feet was filled with rocks and chips—the débris of Fitch's chisel work—and on this Mair found that Bunny was lying awkwardly on his right side.

"What the devil ails him?" thought Mair. "And why won't he let me raise him?" But these were questions which his nimble fingers alone could answer for him.

Fitch was making frenzied, unintelligible movements with his left hand, but Mair's own fingers were too quick for the other to be able to seize them. Rapidly they ran down each of Bunny's legs; then up his body to the left shoulder, along the neck, over the surface of the helmet, and squeezed themselves between the loose stones and the side of the cylinder, exploring the right shoulder and forearm. Then Tom Mair's heart stood still in his body.

In spite of his complete blindness, his sense of touch had now given to him as accurate a picture of the position in which his mate was lying as if the sight had been burned in upon his brain. The cylinder, in its sudden and unexpected descent, had pinned Fitch's arm to the

rock below. He was lying on his side, tethered to the river's bottom by his hand and wrist, with the whole colossal weight of the cylinder serving as a fetter.

The thought of the agony he must be enduring seared Mair's imagination like a red flame cauterizing his brain, and the silence which should have been rent with screams became in an instant a well-nigh unendurable oppression. Yet his mind was working rapidly, and his nervous, sensitive hands were already busy searching for the hammer and chisel with which Fitch had been working. Before many seconds had elapsed he had found the latter; but the hammer, which had been in Fitch's right hand at the moment that the catastrophe befell, eluded him. It had probably been embedded by the sudden subsidence of the cylinder.

At once Mair stood erect, closed the valve of his helmet, signalling all the while for a ladder, which, when lowered to him, he placed with care, so that no part of his mate's diving dress could be pinched by the foot of it. Then he ran up it, his body buoyant with air, and was unscrewing his front glass before the rim of the cylinder was reached.

Breathlessly he told Bruce what had occurred, bade him send for the doctor and his tools, seized a hammer, refixed his glass, and climbed down again into the cylinder.

His idea was to try to chip away the rock beneath Fitch's imprisoned arm, and thus perchance to set it free; but, at the first blow, he felt his mate's whole body plunge and vibrate, even through the diving dress, with the agony occasioned by the shock. Another

blow, and Mair's arm was seized in the iron grip of Fitch's left hand. With a groan of sheer despair, the former dropped his tools. If he could only speak to old Bunny, he thought miserably, perhaps he could nerve him to endure the pain which alone could bring him release. He shook himself free, and picking up his hammer and chisel, again chipped at the rock, but he felt his blow to be nervous and half-hearted, and at once Bunny grasped him anew. Clearly, the task was hopeless. The trammels set upon all his senses save that of touch—the blindness, deafness, dumbness that beset him—raised the horror of the position to a nightmare intensity. Unheard, he was crying upon his Maker as lost souls may cry from the depths of Tophet. Tears mingled with the sweat that, escaping from the cap on his forehead, was pouring down his face. His whole body was tingling and quivering with an almost insanity of rebellion against the impotence that held him powerless to aid his mate. He lacked the nerve to resume the slow chipping and chiselling of the rock which would be rendered doubly slow by his own appreciation of the agony he would be causing, and his mate's unconquerable resistance; yet upon him and upon his unshaken nerve depended, he knew, the life of his friend, aye, and his own reason.

It was a wild-eyed lunatic who presently rushed upward from the depths of the iron well, unscrewing his glass, and calling upon Bruce with inarticulate ravings and curses. The doctor was coming off, paddled by excited coolies; but though he travelled swiftly over the dazzling water, Tom Mair, pinned to the staging by his

leaden-soled boots, rocked in his diving dress, like a maddened elephant at its pickets, shook hands with writhing fingers above his head, and blasphemed with horrible vehemence, entreating him to hasten.

An idea had come to him—had taken possession of him. He knew now what he must do; had appraised the heavy risks, and felt as if each one of them were a red-hot goad driven deep into his naked soul. A cowardly demon within him was screaming to him that his idea was impossible—that he could not carry it out—that he lacked the nerve—that it was foredoomed to failure—that it was asking more of him than could fairly be asked of any man—that he could never muster the resolution to penetrate again into the silence and the darkness wherein his mate lay in mortal, dumb agony. He dreaded every second of delay, lest this devil should gain the mastery of him and drive him into headlong flight from the spot where, hidden by the untroubled waters, Bunny Fitch lay tethered awfully to the river's bed.

The doctor took him roughly by the shoulder and shook him vigorously. "You've got to steady yourself, if you are going to be of any use," he said angrily. "Steady yourself, do you see? And here—drink this."

He helped Mair to pour a stiff tot of brandy down his throat, gripping his shaking hand with calm, capable fingers.

"There's nothing for it," Mair sobbed out. "I've got to cut his blooming arm off! O Gawd! That's what I've got to do, Gawd help me!"

The doctor made some rapid inquiries in a business-

like professional manner, very soothing to Tom's lacerated nerves.

"Yes, my man," he said, when he had assured himself as to the position. "Amputation is the only chance, and you must try it; but remember, you've got to be quick—mighty quick—and you've got to be sure. As soon as you cut the rubber of his diving dress he'll begin to drown if you bungle the job. Now, let me feel your pulse. Galloping like a race horse. Here. Take another drop of brandy and pull yourself together. You're a good workman, they tell me, and you've got an uncommon ticklish job in hand. Don't bungle it. Remember your mate's life depends upon your skill and pluck. Is that the sharpest ax you've got, Bruce?"

Bruce nodded silently. He handed a short wood-ax to Mair, who felt its keen edge gingerly with his thumb. He, too, was silent, but, as he began to screw on his glass, his face was working convulsively, and tears were pouring unheeded down his cheeks.

Again the big automaton—a figure robbed magically of all outward expression of emotion—began to climb down the ladder, and presently was swallowed up by the disturbed water. Bruce, the doctor, and the coolies stood craning their necks to gaze into the baffling depths below them.

Mair, usually so quick, moved with slow, reluctant deliberation down the ladder. The wild excitement of a few moments earlier had died down in him, and had been succeeded by a kind of cold despair. The brandy had steadied him. He was bracing himself consciously

against the ordeal which awaited him down there in the place of horror whereof the terrors presented themselves every instant more and more vividly to his imagination. Vicariously, he seemed to be enduring every pang that was torturing the mind and rending the body of poor Bunny Fitch in his long agony. His own arm throbbed and tingled in sympathy. In fancy, he could feel the cruel shock which each blow of the chisel on the rock had dealt to his mate. Already, it seemed to him, that the still more fierce pain which the first stroke of the ax upon yielding rubber and flesh would inflict upon Bunny was stabbing him—that and the panic fear of death by drowning. Yet now his will was set upon the task awaiting him. It was the only chance. He gritted his teeth together, drew his muscles taut, and nailed himself to his duty. The cowardly devil was subdued and silenced; only Mair moved slowly, seeking thereby to delude himself into the belief that he had regained his calm.

Arrived at the bottom, he once more explored with his fingers the precise position of the tethered arm. The cylinder and the rock had gripped it with a vice-like clasp a couple of inches above the wrist. The hand beyond the cylinder's edge must be lying palm downward. Tom Mair, of course, could *see* nothing; but touch with him had become a sense almost as accurate as that of sight. At the end of three or four minutes of careful and minute groping, during which the very soul of him seemed to have passed into his finger-tips, he had obtained as exact an appreciation of the relative positions of arm, rock, and cylinder-edge as if he had

examined them with his naked eye. For the rest, he was used to hitting the top of a hidden chisel with an invisible hammer for hours a day with force and accuracy.

He drew in his breath and bit his under lip hard; poised the ax, lowered it slowly, measuring his distance, and then brought it down upon Bunny's arm. He felt the blade eat deep into flesh and bone, and was conscious of the insuck of the water through the rent in the rubber casing. Also, he felt Bunny quiver and flounder beneath him as the diving dress filled with water, but he had taken the precaution to grip him with his knees to prevent active interference. Quick as light, he struck again, and yet again; knew that he had severed the arm; signalled wildly to the linesman, and felt Bunny Fitch's body suddenly snatched away from him, as the man at the cylinder's mouth drew him and his water-logged prison swiftly to the surface. The doctor, aided by Bruce, was busy tying the arteries of Bunny's arm by the time Mair had succeeded in scrambling up the ladder and had unscrewed his glass.

"A very clean bit of surgery," the doctor remarked cheerfully, a few moments later, "though I'll make a better job of it presently when I get him ashore. Well done, young man! You've saved this fellow's life."

But Tom Mair did not hear him. Still in his diving dress and looking like some strange mechanical toy which had strayed out of a giant's nursery cupboard, he was sitting on the staging with his big head between his bare hands, rocking his body to and fro and weeping as little children weep.

A TALE OF OLD LABUAN

For I thought the dead had peace, but it is not so;
To have no peace in the grave, is that not sad?

—“*Maud*”.

I

ON TWO sides of the bay—an elbow of blue water thrust by the sea into the waist of the island—the waves lapped slowly against the tangled roots of mangroves which stood ankle-deep in the black slime. Further inland were low hills smothered in mean forest, the ragged foliage on their crests fretting the skyline. On the third side of the bay the white and blue plasters with which the Chinese smear the fronts of their shops gave up their crude tints to the sun glare, and the squalid town looked like a fungous growth which had fastened itself to the face of the island. Behind it also were low hills, thin jungle, and a pale, uneven horizon.

At the point on the extreme right as you faced the shore, a cliff rose from the sea abruptly, like the massive side of a portal the fellow to which was lacking. Through a sparse curtain of tattered greenery, patches of red soil showed like the naked flesh of the land. On the summit of this cliff stood a rude stone building, the civil prison of the place; at its feet there was a tiny streak of shining white sand, marking the spot where

the beach and the fringe of casuarina trees replaced the dingy mangrove swamps.

Before the town, half-a-dozen Chinese junks, with small red flags a-flutter, lay rocking and creaking by the rickety wharves; a few native dugouts passed to and fro laden with fruit and garden produce; and a quarter of a mile from the shore, the white bulk of a British man-o'-war squatted on the green waters with all the ponderous shapelessness of a toad.

In the Captain's cabin aft, four men sat at luncheon. Through one of the great square ports, unoccupied now by the big blunt-nosed gun which, in time of strife, it was designed to accommodate, a few islands covered with forest—long smears of hazy black upon the face of the sunlit sea—were visible, and beyond them an irregular blue line, mixing with the clouds and surmounting a low smudge of dim gray-green, marked the coast and the nearest mountain chain of the mainland of Borneo.

The captain of the man-o'-war and his first lieutenant were dressed in cool white uniforms; their guests, the Governor of the island and Walter Tracy who, with a doctor and a few native understrappers, made up the entire civil service of the colony, wore riding breeches and neat khaki tunics. A couple of Chinese servants passed to and fro, waiting upon the Europeans.

"Well, we shall always have a very pleasant recollection of our stay here, anyway," said the Captain. "We have all had a capital time of it, thanks to you, and shall be sorry when we turn our backs upon you this afternoon. All the same, I must say that I should

not, for choice, select Labuan for my permanent home."

The Governor laughed. "I don't fancy that that is a selection which any one would make of his own free will," he said. "Tracy and I are good little boys who go where we are bidden and do what we are told, and as a reward, we are, like good little boys, given our bread and butter, and ever so little a scrape of jam with it. That is what keeps us here, that and the magnificent prospect of some day being transferred to a hole on the West Coast of Africa, or some equally delightful place, where we may extend our experience by sampling another kind of fever."

"Talking of fever," said the Captain, "I hope that you will tell Mrs. Tracy how very disappointed we are not to have seen her here to-day. I trust she is better?"

"Thank you," answered Tracy. "She was a trifle better when I left her, but until we drain the swamps round the town, the place will never be really healthy. The site chosen was about the worst that could have been hit upon."

"And draining costs money," said the Governor. "Our death rate is a good deal better than it used to be in the beginning of things, and it has never approached the magnificent figures of the West Coast, but, all the same, it is capable of improvement without a doubt."

"Whatever can have induced the British Government to plant a colony in such an unlikely place as this?" asked the Captain. "It was a desert island in those days, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied the Governor. "It was uninhabited and uninviting, but great things were hoped of it.

The first Rajah of Sarawak was mainly responsible. He thought that it would grow into a second Singapore, and with the example of Sir Stamford Raffles' success before his eyes, he was dazzled by his dreams of what Labuan might become. There is coal of sorts on the island, the harbour, as you see, is a good one, and the mainland of northern Borneo was an unknown quantity in those days, which, for aught they knew to the contrary, might possess all the wealth of the world. It was a chance, and, as such, worth taking; but it has been a pretty bad break from the first. Very few ships call here; we produce nothing; and the people of the mainland are mostly Mûruts, an unpleasant race of homicidal maniacs, who are possessed by a passion for owning other folks' skulls and bones. Therefore, the prospects of Labuan ended where they began—in a dream. You have only to look at the island to see that its æon-long rest should never have been broken, that it has now fallen fast asleep again, and that it is never going to wake up for a second time."

"Labuan isn't asleep. It's dead, dead beginning to putrefy! Can't you smell it?" said Tracy grimly, as a whiff of fouled air came from the swamps.

"Have another B. and S.," said the Captain, with some vague idea of comforting the youngster, with whose depression he sympathized heartily. It must be a truly awful thing, he thought, to be chained for years to the corpse of this lifeless colony!

"No, thank you," said Tracy. "We have a hot ride in the sun before us, and one has to be careful in this delightful country. There isn't any point in filling

the graveyards quicker than we can help. As it is, headstones would be about our biggest article of import, if we ran to such luxuries."

"If I were going to be buried in Labuan, I shouldn't care about such frills as headstones," said the First Lieutenant. "But I think I should ask my pals to keep a certain amount of earth over me and to scare away the wild swine."

"What do you mean?" asked the Governor, whose face had suddenly become very grave.

"Oh, nothing—only, when I was riding past the cemetery this morning, it struck me that things were a trifle slack, don't you know; but I suppose it can't be helped in a place where there are so many funerals. All the same, I should prefer a deeper grave myself."

"Let us change the subject," said the Governor abruptly. "Tracy, here, is giving us all a fit of the blues. We are talking as though we were the keepers of a morgue."

So the conversation drifted off into other and more cheerful channels: tales of places beyond the narrow seas which gird Labuan around, and jests about the men who lived there; talk of home, and stubble and covert, and good days spent in the land of lands to which the exile's heart sets constantly; and so the time slipped by and the hour came for departure. The Governor walked past his guard of marines, bade farewell to his hosts, and, followed by Tracy, went down the ladder into his gig. In silence, the two men rowed ashore, and as they went, the pipe of the boatswain sounded on board the ship, and the rattle of the anchor

chain filled the quiet bay with rude noise. After landing on the wharf, the Governor and Tracy stood for a few moments watching the ship get under way. The younger man looked at the big screws churning up the waters at her stern as she began to sweep seaward, and his eyes were filled with a kind of angry despair, for in her going he saw the snapping of yet another of the woefully few links that still bound him and his to the life that lay beyond the limits of the narrow island world. A deepened sense of isolation and loneliness, and a pang of acute nostalgia smote him anew with the force of blows, not for himself—he was case-hardened, inured to exile, he did not matter—but for the little ailing wife whom an incredible selfishness had doomed to a lifetime of this dreary banishment. What right had he had to ask any girl to share with him such a lot as this? It seemed to him that he had laid upon the shoulders of the woman he loved a burden too heavy to be borne, that he had robbed her of all that made existence worth having, and in exchange had given her nothing—only his own worthless self. And now her very health was being filched from her to complete the sacrifice! She must leave him, she must go home. He knew how she would resist the mere notion of it, but he shut his lips firmly. Labuan was no place for a woman. They must postpone their married life until a cold-blooded government saw fit to move him to some more congenial spot. And when would that be? Never, perhaps; not for years, certainly.

The voice of the Governor broke in upon his melancholy reverie.

"Did you hear what that man said about the cemetery?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Tracy.

"Well, I want you to ride up there with me before you go home."

"Do you think that anything is wrong, sir?"

"I think all manner of things, but we'll talk about that when we get there. You are new to this place, and do not yet know all the charming habits of the gentle Mârut. Come along."

They walked to the end of the pier and mounted their sturdy Borneo ponies, little flea-bitten roans which had the air of being all head and feet. The two men cantered through the town and up the long avenue which cuts inland toward the heart of the island, passing the white gates of Government House, and so to the flat hill at the back of all things upon which the European burial ground is situated.

There are few things more sad in all the world than these out-of-the-way graveyards of Asia, in which such of our folk as have dropped out of the ranks of the Empire's foremost skirmishing line are laid to rest. Trim white posts and rails fence them in, symbols of the narrow life that killed the sleepers; the rank, crudely coloured grasses grow with a horrible luxuriance that defies all attempts at decency and neatness; the pitiless sun glare smites down upon those comfortless resting places, cracking the dry earth till it gapes hideously through a thousand parched mouths; the abomination of utter desolation reigns here supreme.

From these woeful spots no poet could draw gentle

inspiration such as might spring from the contemplation of quiet God's acres in the dear home country, for about them there is no air of peace, no restful, holy calm whereof the sadness is so chastened that it only serves to hallow and make beautiful: instead, there is a sense of ugly banishment even in the grave, of exposure to the cruel sun glare, a nerve-torturing feeling of discomfort and unrest. Looking upon these melancholy places, a man needs no imagination to set him wondering whether the uncared-for dead can find any peace amid surroundings which harrow with their ugly melancholy even the most callous of the living.

As they neared the cemetery gate, the Governor's pony shied half across the road at some white object in the grass by the wayside. His rider dismounted and hitched him to a tree, and Tracy, after following suit, turned toward his chief, and saw him bending over the thing which had startled the pony.

"Look here," said the Governor.

Peeping over his senior's shoulder, Tracy saw lying in the grass the thigh bone of a man, to which some discoloured fragments of flesh and muscle still adhered. An abominable reek sickened the hot air.

"What is the meaning of it?" asked Tracy. Unconsciously, he dropped his voice to a whisper and spoke as men speak in the presence of the dead.

"Mûruts," said the Governor laconically, and as he turned away and entered the burial ground, he cursed bitterly through his set teeth. The desecration of the dead of one's own race by people of an inferior breed is ever a terrible thing to behold, and it has the power

to stir up strange tumults of passion in a white man's heart.

Within the cemetery fence, all was confusion—a shapeless, empty excavation occupied the place where the most recent grave mound had been; around it were piles of earth, heaps of broken glass bottles, the rotting planks of a coffin that had been torn roughly asunder, to which fragments of the black cloth that had covered it clung like foul fungi; and strewn hither and thither were the bones of a human being.

“It is poor Faber,” said the Governor, naming an officer who had died of the island fever some six weeks earlier. He pointed to an object lying in the rank grass behind the overturned wooden cross that had marked the head of the grave. It was a part of the dead man's backbone, to which some of the ribs were still attached—thin yellow-green hoops, discoloured and unsightly, that obtruded themselves upon the sight beneath a cloud of noisy flies.

Tracy looked for an instant, and turned away choking and coughing. “Great God!” he cried, and his words were broken by a sob. “What devils! What devils!”

“See,” said the Governor. “I made them put a thick layer of broken bottles above him, hoping that that would keep him safe, but it has been no sort of use. The Mûruts must have lifted them off bit by bit till they got at the bones, and they have scattered him broadcast, broadcast!”

Tracy, quite unmanned, sat down on a neighbouring grave, with his back to the horror, and the Governor

strode over to him and laid a kind hand upon the young fellow's shoulder.

"Buck up," he said. "I want you to go down to the hospital and find Jenkins for me. Only a doctor can tell us what bones are missing, though the skull has gone, of course. Don't trouble to come back here; there is nothing that you can do. Take my advice, go straight home after you have found Jenkins, and drink a strong B. and S.: it will help to pull you together."

"Thank you, sir," said Tracy. He rose stiffly, and walked toward his pony, stepping cautiously lest he should unwittingly spurn some part of what had been the body of a friend, and keeping his eyes averted from the terrible things that lay strewn about his path. In this distant land, Death was a fearful spectre that grinned at the exiles constantly—imminent, triumphant, threatening.

The thought of it haunted men waking, and pursued them in their dreams. The horror of dying out here in obscure banishment, dying like rats in holes, was an ever-present dread; but if death were to be followed by nameless outrages such as had been perpetrated upon the body of poor Faber, it became in an instant doubly hideous, doubly terrible.

So thought Walter Tracy, as he galloped toward the hospital, and again a feeling of desperation seized him, wringing him with a pain that was all the more keen because it was suffered, not for himself, but for another. If *she* were to die out here, and to be buried in that awful place! The green earth about him turned

hazy and reeling as he looked at it through the sun glare.

The Governor seated himself upon a grave and lighted his pipe. The futility of the task which had been set him, the administration of this worthless island with its obscure past, its hopeless future, and its ugly present, smote him with deep depression. If he could have felt that any good were likely to come of all this suffering and sacrifice, he could have borne it cheerfully, but the conviction that he and his fellows were wasting some precious years of life, were risking health and happiness to no purpose, made him resentful and melancholy. His energetic nature was cramped by this life of enforced inaction, his spirits were weighed down to the earth by the dead monotony of the island, which was broken only by such acts of savagery as this outrage on the dead. Among his fellows, it was part of his duty to keep a brave face and to hearten up those who lacked his strength. Now that he was alone, alone with the dead, he threw his arms aloft in a passionate gesture, and broke out into the bitterest of all human cries:

“Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness: let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Why died I not from the womb? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest!” As it is,” he grumbled, “it does not promise much stillness or quiet or rest if one is to be buried in Labuan!” He bit hard upon the mouth-

piece of his pipe, and broke the amber short off in his teeth.

"Damn!" he said mechanically. "What a poor plucked one I am to whine like this! It will be all the same, I suppose, a hundred years hence!"

His evil hour was upon him, and he fought it out doggedly and alone, with only those scattered bones of the man who had been his friend, and the dreary grave mounds, for witnesses of his weakness. When Jenkins, the doctor, joined him half an hour later, the Governor was as calm, as resolutely cheerful, as seemingly callous, and as practical as ever.

II

The heat of the tropical noontide poured down from the colourless sky, gleaming hard, pitiless as the tempered blade of a weapon.

The fronds of the cocoanut trees stiffened and lifted as it parched them; almost every living thing had sought shelter, and the land was profoundly still, wrapped in the heavy, restless silence of pain; the only sound was the occasional trickle of dry soil, as fragments broke off from bank or mound, and slipped downward with a tiny rustle. A few disconsolate crows sat perched upon the trees with gaping beaks, gasping for air. All about the island the sea lay like a sheet of pale blue glass, its surface oily and unrefreshing to the eye. Its horrible, sickly expanse, blindingly refracting the vertical rays, conveyed no suggestion of cooling waters: it was a white-hot floor upon which the island rested, baking agonizingly beneath the white-hot sky.

The shutters of Tracy's little bungalow were close shut. Without, a score or so of tired-looking fruit trees stood in despondent groups, their branches drooping languidly, albeit the earth about the roots had been recently upturned to stimulate the flow of sluggish sap. Within the bungalow, a dull dusk reigned—not the dim religious light which falls so gratefully behind closed blinds on a hot summer's day in England, but a breathless, airless, quivering darkness, split across and across by blinding bars of light wherever a crack in the shutters or a tiny rift in the walls enabled a ray to penetrate. The stifling twilight and the oppressive stillness brought no sense of calm or peace—they did not woo to slumber: rather, they created an atmosphere of unrest, a painful feeling of divorce from the bare possibility of sleep, a feverish discomfort that set every nerve on edge.

In the airless gloom of the bedroom, Pearl Tracy lay stretched upon the bed, with the heavy folds of the mosquito net looped up unevenly around the canopy above her head. Her cheeks were hollow, and in the centre of each a scarlet patch burned in awful contrast to the pallor of her face. Her lips were parted, and she drew her breath noisily, with a laboured monotony of sound that was as the very voice of restlessness. Her wide gray eyes, that in health were wont to be so soft and so changing in their expression, were open to their full extent, hard, gleaming, and fixed in a sightless glare. Her dark hair was plaited in a long tail that lay across her breast. Her form was wasted dreadfully, and her little slender arms showed the stiff lines of the bones, and were swollen into unsightly bosses at wrists and

elbows. Once in a while she would essay to move them, and they would lift ever so feebly ere they fell back again on to the sheet. Now and again, too, her head would roll from side to side upon her pillow, with a motion eloquent of impotence that seeks escape from pain, and at such times she would murmur broken words and sentences, mere fragments of inarticulate complaint very pitiful to hear.

By the bedside, Walter Tracy sat watching her, rising now and then to moisten her parched lips, to arrange her pillow more comfortably with clumsy masculine touch, or to smooth the sheet upon which she lay. He had maintained this watch now unbrokenly for many hours, and his form was bowed with fatigue, his eyes were hollow with misery and sleeplessness, his face was aged and drawn with suffering.

The close atmosphere, the dead unrestful quiet of the room, the dim twilight which yet was powerless to decrease the appalling heat, all preyed upon his nerves, while the sorrow that was gnawing at his heart, his love and pity for his little wife, and the maddening consciousness of his utter impotence to aid or save her, combined to well nigh unhinge his mind. The power of consecutive thought had deserted him. Again and again, trifling, irrelevant memories of his childhood obtruded themselves upon his consciousness, dogged him with inconsequent persistence. Over and over again he dwelt upon the recollection of the days in which he had wooed the stricken girl before him, not with pleasure, but with a horrified surprise at his own monstrous selfishness, for had he not known the sort of

life to which marriage with him would condemn her, the sort of death to which his love might doom her, the death which she now was dying here, before his very eyes?

And though this train of thought recurred with merciless reiteration, it was interrupted at every turn by all sorts of inconsequences, whose irritating intrusion he was powerless to control. At one moment, he would see Pearl's face as it had looked during some tender passage of their love story; at another the face of a school comrade, long since forgotten, would come between him and his vision with elfish cruelty. He strained every nerve to concentrate his mind upon the one all-important matter that engaged his thoughts—his own share of responsibility and blame for the tragedy that was robbing him of his darling; but his every effort was futile, and his mind, broken away from all control, stumbled hither and thither in mazes of irrelevancy, and refused to obey his will.

Yet, through all, he never for an instant lost consciousness of the misery that was overwhelming him, of the still form upon the bed, and of his inability to do aught to relieve Pearl's sufferings. He was tortured by the knowledge that her sick room lacked everything which in Europe tends to relieve the intensity of discomfort, that the appliances at the disposal of this wretched colony were hopelessly inadequate, that the doctor who tended her was no specialist upon whose genius and intuition he could rely, that even the diet and the drugs supplied were things that a cottage hospital at home would regard with scant favour, that fate

itself was against him, the stars in their courses conspiring to rob him of his love. That the best the circumstances permitted was being done for Pearl was a fact that held no comfort. She was all the world to him, his love, his wife, his darling, and she lay there in torture under his very eyes, and he could do nothing to alleviate her pain, only watch it in impotent agony, cursing himself for a useless brute, and longing for the skill of nurse and doctor, which might have turned the balance in her favour, but for the ruthless facts of distance and of time.

These were the thoughts that had borne him company during two whole days and one endless night of watching, and the afternoon of the second day found him wild with rage against all the world, fierce as a trapped beast, hating himself, and filled with a savage fury against fate. Jenkins, the doctor, stole into the room, stumbling clumsily against a bedside table, for his eyes were blinded from the glare through which he had been riding. He drew a clinical thermometer from its case and took Pearl's temperature. He gazed at the clambering mercury and shook his head ruefully.

"You have given her the medicines?" he asked.

"Of course," whispered Tracy hoarsely.

Jenkins shook his head again and passed out of the room. Tracy rose and followed him.

"What do you think?" he questioned fiercely.

"The temperature keeps up. The fever does not yield. If only we had some ice!" said the doctor.

Tracy swore aloud. "What in the wide world is the

good of talking about *if?*” he cried. “Man alive, can’t you *do* something?”

“I have been doing all I can, my dear fellow,” began the doctor soothingly, but Tracy cut him short.

“And what good have you done?” he asked brutally. “You’ve tried a lot of useless drugs, and what effect have they had? You have only added to her pain, poor child. Oh, my God! If only I could get a decent doctor and a proper nurse, they might save her!”

“My dear Tracy,” Jenkins protested. “It is no good blaming me. I have done the best I can for her. I can’t give life.”

“Of course you can’t,” said Tracy brokenly. “I beg your pardon. It is not your fault. You did not bring her to this hole of a place. Thank God upon your knees for that!” and he turned and reëntered the sick room.

The afternoon crept on, and at last a little puff of cooler air from off the sea set the branches of the fruit trees rustling without the bungalow, and told that the brief coolness of the hour before the dusk had come at last. Tracy rose, and moving stiffly across the room, flung the windows wide. A refreshing breath of air in motion fanned his cheek. Pearl stirred upon the bed.

He turned toward her, and saw that her eyes had lost the fixed look that they had worn so long. He bent over her, and very faintly her voice whispered his name. A wild hope sprang up in his heart, and something in his throat choked him as he stooped and kissed her. Then, for a few minutes, he busied himself with the thin milk which he tried to induce her to swallow. The

fever, as sometimes happens at the very last, had left her, but all too soon even Tracy's scant knowledge told him that the consciousness that had been given to her was but the preface to the long sleep which would have no ending in this life.

He lay down beside her, holding her wasted hands in his strong clasp, and, for one priceless hour, these two, whom love had bound together, whom death was soon to separate, spoke heart to heart and soul to soul. What each said to each as they lay there, nearer than ever before, in the valley of the shadow of death, is not for alien ears to hearken to, and the secret is one that is locked in the heart of a single human being, an old and lonely man, who all his life since has drawn strength and comfort from the words that then came to him from the lips of a dying girl.

III

The sun had dipped below the horizon, and the afternoon was waning, when at last Walter Tracy rose from his knees at the bedside of his dead wife, and moved slowly to the window.

He stood there looking out upon the quiet evening landscape, the splendour of the western sky, the cool, melancholy dusk that was stealing up over the land and plunging it in misty shadows, and upon all the familiar things that of a sudden had become strange to his sight. From the direction of the sea came the broken-hearted cries of gulls; nearer at hand, little birds, hidden in the foliage, were piping and cheeping sleepily; bats were flitting hither and thither, swift and noiseless as swal-

lows. The soft breeze that awakes with the twilight was whispering in the branches of the fruit trees.

Walter Tracy leant against the frame of the long window, inert and listless. The magnitude of the calamity that had befallen him had numbed his faculties. Mechanically, he noted the marvellous tints with which the heavens were stained, the sounds that came to his ears, the sights that met his eyes, yet one and all of these things were shrouded in a haze of unreality. He knew that Pearl was dead, that she had gone from him for ever, that never again would he look upon her living face, listen to her voice, or feel the touch of her little hand upon his arm. This knowledge was beating itself in upon his brain; he was striving to understand it with a painful effort, as though it were some fact that he was trying to commit to memory; yet, all the time, it was meaningless to him, like some conundrum propounded in a dream, more unreal even than the shadowy landscape upon which his unseeing eyes were fixed.

He was spent and exhausted by grief and long watching. He had not tasted food for many hours; he had had many broken nights of late, and since early in the morning of the previous day he had not closed an eye. From the first he had been agonized by the sight of Pearl's sufferings, of which he had been the impotent witness; he had been haunted by terrible apprehensions; had been driven half mad by despair and misery; had been oppressed by the dread certainty that her illness would surely end in death; had been racked by the knowledge that she might perhaps have been saved had circumstances been other than they were; and had been

filled with blind rage against fate and against all mankind. His very soul had been rent and tortured by all these conflicting emotions; and now that his worst fears had been realized, now that his Pearl, his love, had been taken from him for ever, utter exhaustion had deprived him even of the power to feel.

The darkness crept up, obscuring the world, merging all things within and without the bungalow into huge misshapen shadows, and still Walter Tracy leant against the window-frame, numb and dazed, conscious only of a dull ache at his heart, and of a mind that, baffling his efforts to control it, flew ceaselessly from one triviality to another. Yet through this mental haze, an idea began to take form—vague and inconsequent, but persistent.

There was some duty to be performed, some act of service to his love that still remained to be done. He was conscious that the thing had been present in his mind since Pearl was first seized by the fever; that it had oppressed him dreadfully; yet now, in maddening fashion, it eluded him. What was it? He asked the question of his weary brain, and fought with almost a physical effort to wring from it an answer. It was something that he knew to be painful, horrible, yet necessary. What was it? What was it?

He turned from the window and groped his way through the darkness toward the bedside. A white figure standing by the door suddenly made itself seen, and, with all his nerves a-quiver, Tracy jumped aside, his heart beating like a drum. A second later, he had recognized the apparition as the white dressing gown

which Pearl had been wont to wear, that now hung on a hook against the door, but the shock which it had given him had set his dulled brain working, had fired a train of thought. He had shied like a horse at the sight of that white object, just as the Governor's horse had shied at—at what? Ah, now he knew!

In an instant, he saw in his mind's eye that dismal, unrestful graveyard, with the yellow soil upturned above a new grave, the pitiless sun glare beating down upon it, and those awful fragments of poor Faber's dishonoured body scattered about among the rank growths. In a flash, imagination painted for him a mob of squalid savages rooting in the grave with busy fingers, their ghoulish faces eager with hideous excitement; and it was not the corpse of Faber or another with whom they grappled so horribly, but the body of his darling! The impression was so vivid, the horror so intense, that Tracy reeled back against the bedpost as though he had been struck. He turned suddenly giddy, and a great nausea was upon him. It seemed to him that the outrage had actually been committed—and, blazing with wrath, he uttered a short cry, throwing out his arms wildly.

Then his hand encountered the still, cold hand of his dead wife, and immediately his calmness was restored. The act of desecration had not yet happened, and must not happen. That was the one service that he could still render to his love. The necessity for action, immediate action that called for a sustained physical effort, awoke him from the species of stupor in which he was plunged, and saved, perhaps, his toppling reason.

At once he was thinking clearly, consecutively, forming a plan: an instant later, he was toiling to put that plan into execution.

Stooping in the darkness to kiss Pearl upon the forehead, he whispered to her to have no fear. Then he passed from the room and out of the bungalow. He groped and stumbled to the toolhouse and selected a large spade and a big native hoe. Then, taking elaborate precautions to avoid noise, he set to work to dig a grave at the root of one of the fruit trees in his compound. He was weak from want of food, and the sweat poured from him, but he dug on doggedly. Great blisters rose on his hands, but he did not heed them. Under the stress of the physical toil, his mind resumed its wonted clearness. He realized at last all that Pearl's death meant to him. He saw the long empty years stretching away before him, and a great self-pity made the lump rise in his throat and tears gather to his eyes. But never did he slacken his efforts. The hard work was grateful to him because it was borne for Pearl, because it was the last act of love that he might do for her dear sake.

At the end of a strenuous hour, the grave was completed, and Tracy passed into the bungalow and helped himself to a whisky and soda. Then he returned to the garden and fell to delving anew. Hour after hour, he toiled. No sooner was one grave made at the foot of a fruit tree than he set to work tearing at the earth about the roots of its nearest neighbour. From time to time, he rested a little, and the chill night air smote coldly on his drenched clothing. The palms of his hands were

flayed; he groaned as he dug; he toiled like a demon, casting an anxious glance now and again at the eastern horizon. He was working against time—working for Pearl—and he would not allow weariness to overcome him till his allotted task was accomplished.

The third of the small hours had come and gone when at last he straightened his back and looked with satisfaction at the grave which he had just completed. It was the fifteenth. He reëntered the bungalow, bathed himself in the bathroom, changed his clothes, and then made his way to the bedside of his dead wife. Very tenderly, he lifted her in his arms, crooning to her as though she still could hear him, and bore her out into the garden, casting about him the while glances of half-insane suspicion. He selected a grave somewhat deeper than its fellows, in the bottom of which he had already placed a sheet.

With great difficulty, and with such clumsy reverence as he could command, he lowered Pearl's body into the pit, clambered down and disposed the limbs carefully, kissed her cold lips again and again, and then reluctantly drew a second sheet over her from head to heel. Next he fell to shovelling in the earth. Ah, how those falling clods hurt him as they fell upon her! How he winced at the sound of their dull impact! But it must be done, it was for her sake—he set his teeth and dug with furious energy.

At last, the grave was filled to the brim, and Tracy, shaken by dry sobs, passed mechanically on to the next, and then the next. In this manner, in less than an hour, he had covered in every one of his excavations,

and so cunningly had he worked that there was nothing whereby an observer could distinguish between that which Pearl's body occupied and the others which were empty. To a casual stranger it would have appeared that the soil about the roots of all the fruit trees had been upturned with a care and energy very unusual in a native gardener, but the secret which was locked in Walter Tracy's bosom was one which not even Mûrut curiosity would be able to discover.

The dawn was breaking grayly when, his heavy task accomplished, Tracy stood bareheaded in the centre of his compound, and read in the wan light the solemn words of the burial service. Then, with the daybreak anthem of the birds ringing through the shady grove, he walked back into his empty bungalow. He stumbled to his bedroom, worn out in body and mind, threw himself down upon the sheets, and fell at once into a deep, dreamless sleep. It was not only Pearl Tracy's body, perhaps, which that night of strenuous toil had saved from destruction.

Walter Tracy has fared far since that day, has garnered much honour and fame, such measure of wealth as may fall to the lot of a Colonial civil servant, and a whole comet's-tail of capital letters after his name. Promotion has borne him far away from Labuan to other and happier lands, yet that little sun-baked island, cast away upon the coast of northern Borneo, is more dear to him, I think, than any spot on earth. It is true that its memories haunt him as the scene of the overshadowing tragedy of his life, but, none the less, he

often revisits in spirit the nameless grave, hidden beneath the shade of the fruit trees that cluster about an ancient bungalow, the grave the site of which is known to him alone, wherein lies buried very peacefully the treasure of his heart.

GREATER LOVE

Greater love hath no man than this,
that he lay down his life for his friend.

I

A THREADY chorus of war whoops sounded from out the jungle, its volume, at each repetition, growing fainter and mellow with distance. The little band of *dakairs*, having wrought by its stolen ambush such mischief as it might, was drawing off exulting and triumphant. Hidden securely by the tangle of greenery, the foemen knew themselves to be safe from pursuit, knew that the baffled white men, whom they had smitten so shrewdly, must accept their check with what meekness they could command, and would have their hands full for the present, patching up their wounded and burying their dead. It was this knowledge that made the savage war yells tingle with such insolent glee, ring with such mockery, such contempt.

Tommy Burton, the political officer, stood in what a few moments earlier had been the foremost firing line, with his useless revolver still undischarged in his hand, staring about him like a man in a dream. All around, the bearded Indian soldiers, sweating from their recent exertions, their khaki uniforms torn by the thorn

thickets through which their rush had been made, were forming up in little groups upon the jungle-smothered hill-cap whereon their enemy had so lately been posted. Their teeth glistened as they grinned nervously at one another; they drew breath with sobbing pants, but already their tongues were beginning to wag, discussing in raucous falsetto speech the fight that was just ended. Between the soaring trunks of the forest trees the smoke of the rifle fire still hung in a thin mist, the edges of which writhed away in slow contortions.

Already the incidents with which the last ten minutes had been packed seemed to Tommy as unreal, as incredible as though they belonged to the memories of some former life; the start from camp, made barely two hours ago in the chill of the early morning, was part and parcel of a very distant past, had had its being, with all other happy and light-hearted things, in a period infinitely remote. Since then, it seemed to Tommy, the very face of the earth had suffered change. It was impossible to identify the world in which he now stood with that other sane and wholesome world in which hitherto it had been good to live.

And as he stood thus, numb and dazed, now that the need for action was ended, his memory was busy mechanically conjuring up a picture of all that had befallen, reënacting every incident of the last few minutes. Walter Fairleigh and he, with Oliver Salmon, the newly arrived subaltern, had been walking briskly along the narrow jungle footpath in single file. They had been stepping out with the springy gait, laughing and jesting with the *gaieté de cœur* which, in the tropics, come to

even the healthiest of white men only with the cool fragrance and cheerfulness of the early morning hour. They had all three been instinct with the sheer joy of being alive, with the delight of drawing breath, of snuffing the scented forest air, of feeling the tingle of young blood, the rhythmic movement of tireless young limbs. The small detachment of armed natives that formed their escort had been tramping before and behind them, the men marching at ease and chatting as they went. Although the district was in a state of disturbance, the white men had had no reason to believe that any party of the enemy was near at hand, wherefore, a sudden spurt of rifle fire, bursting with an angry crackle from the forest-clad hill which skirted the path some twenty yards to their right, had taken them completely unawares. Salmon, who had been walking immediately in front of Tommy, had wheeled sharply round upon him with anger in his face. "Damn it all!" he had cried. "Can't you take care what you are doing with your stick?" and an instant later he had squatted on the ground, examining with interested curiosity a hole in his thigh, from which the blood was trickling grudgingly. While Tommy still watched him, barely realizing what had happened, Salmon had attempted to flounder on to his feet again, and then had sunk back with a groan. "They've winged me, the beggars!" Tommy had heard him cry.

Heavy firing was going on now on all sides, the *dakaitis* blazing away joyously from behind the trunks of trees and the dense curtain of thorn-brake, while the native soldiers loosed off their carbines as fast as they

could cram in cartridges, without aim or direction. The towering walls of forest that hemmed in the slender track hid the enemy loyally, and his hiding places were indicated only by little clouds of smoke which leaped forth hurriedly, stopping short with a jerk, as though arrested by the sound of the clanging reports. Deafened by the din, half stunned by the shock, dazed and bewildered by the suddenness of the attack, Tommy had stood where he was, gazing about him with a kind of paralysis of despair at the hopeless confusion into which the men had been thrown by the ambush, and as he gazed, a hideous weakness had seized him. Death, of a sudden, had seemed very near, inevitable, imminent, and more ghastly than ever he had dreamed it. One or two of the sepoys had pitched headlong into the scrub, some lying limp and still, others flogging the ground wildly with arms and legs. Their fellows were plainly demoralized, and a cold fear had clutched at Tommy's heart, for the conviction had been on him that irreparable disaster had smitten the little force, and that he, too, was involved in its ruin. He had felt physically sick, and through his mind there had stormed a jostling crowd of sensations, new to his inexperience, while the chill magic of fear held him spellbound. Then he had caught sight of Walter Fairleigh—the man whom he loved, admired, “swore by” with all a lad's enthusiastic hero worship—and forthwith every other emotion had been swallowed up by a veritable passion of horror and dismay. For Fairleigh had been cowering behind the bole of a huge tree, his face drawn and white to the lips, his eyes alive with terror, his empty hands clawing

at nothing with spasmodic, nervous gropings, while he cried to the men to seek shelter in a voice that was tremulous and well-nigh inarticulate.

One glance had sufficed to burn into Tommy's perception the incredible truth that Walter Fairleigh, of all men in the world—Walter Fairleigh, who, in the pursuit of big game, had given tokens, not once, but many times, of a reckless courage—was now, in this moment of supreme stress, rendered impotent and shameless by ungovernable fear! “And am I looking like that, too?” Tommy had thought. Then he had turned away his eyes, loth to gaze longer upon a spectacle that held for him such a poignancy of pain, feeling that to pry into the soul of his friend, now that it was stripped to such pitiful nakedness, was an outrage, an indecency—ashamed to his very marrow to have seen what he had seen, and desperate suddenly, with a smarting rage that drove out fear, because the man whom he loved, in whom he had believed intensely, had failed him. And, as he turned, Salmon's voice, quivering with anger, sharp and strident with physical suffering, had sounded in his ears.

“Look at the damned coward, sneaking there behind the tree!” it had cried. “Lead the men yourself, Burton, for God's sake! Don't wait for him!” And the voice had broken in a splutter of almost hysterical imprecations.

Those words had stung Tommy like so many whip lashes laid across his face. It was horrible to him that any living soul should have witnessed Walter Fairleigh's shame—the shame which, Tommy felt, was his own in

equal measure—most horrible of all that that witness should be Salmon. The new subaltern's forced intrusion upon their long comradeship had been resented by Fairleigh and Tommy alike; they had been prejudiced against him from the first, and more intimate acquaintance had led them to write him down a cad, a bounder, and a Jew-boy. All this had been vividly, yet vaguely, present to Tommy's mind as, tingling with rage, he had thrown himself headlong into the firing-line, yelling to the men in the vernacular, and by the sheer force of his own impetuosity had borne them forward with him, through those cruel thorn-thickets, in a furious charge upon the hillcrest whence the *dakaitis* were firing. As they breasted the slope, several of the men had pecked and stumbled, some to squat limply, some to writhe in dreadful contortions, others with arms and legs wide-flung in a horrible *abandon*; but, Tommy's fighting blood fairly up now, he had carried his men with him, straight at the ambushed enemy, with the blind fury of a charging bull. During that rush he had had no thought of his own safety, no fear of danger; he had recked nothing what might befall him, since that had happened to Walter and to him which made life a thing detestable. He had been possessed throughout the onslaught by a veritable insanity of anger, by a mad hunger for retaliation upon the *dakaitis* whose attack had precipitated so terrible a disaster—a calamity, undreamed-of by them, beside which, in Tommy's estimation, the total blotting out of the little force had been as nothing! But the *dakaitis* had clung to cover with their wonted skill, had drawn off into the

wilderness at precisely the right moment, and when the deserted hill-cap had been reached, and the delirium of action was past, Tommy stood still, listening to the mockery of the receding war whoops, feeling as though he had dreamed an evil dream. The insistent, unreal reality of all that had happened preyed upon him, chilling him to the heart, depressing him with a cold despair, weighing him down with a burden of unmitigable misery. The abject fear, of which he had so lately been the victim, still shook him with a tremor which he could not restrain. That he had conquered it, he knew, was owing, not to any virtue of his own, but to the shame and horror which had seized him when he had discovered that Walter Fairleigh was similarly beset. Fairleigh had come very near to being his ideal of all that a man should be, and behold, his ideal had failed him! Staggered by the blow which had thus been dealt him, Tommy, as he stood dazed and wretched on the hilltop, could take no comfort from the knowledge that he himself, his first panic forgotten, had "come again."

Then, very slowly and reluctantly, he turned about and began to make his way down to the path below, back to the narrow world to which he belonged, back to the old life which, he miserably felt, could never again be quite as it had been.

II

A week had passed since the morning of the scrimmage in the forest—seven whole days and nights—of which each leaden-footed minute that had made up the

waking hours seemed to Tommy, who had slept ill, to have crawled with torturing slowness. Oliver Salmon, his eyes and cheeks already flaming with fever, had been lifted, limp and spent, into the sag of a doolie, and had been carried out of camp *en route* for the nearest base hospital. This had happened six days earlier, and since then Tommy Burton and Walter Fairleigh had been alone, terribly alone, left to make the best they might of an embarrassing tête-à-tête which was like the mocking wraith of their former honest comradeship. And, during all this dreary time, the one subject that was uppermost in both their minds had not been so much as named between them. It is the habit of the men of the outskirts, when such an incident as the brush with the *dakaitis* has broken the dead monotony of their days, to discuss the thing endlessly, to fight and refight the "scrap" in imagination, to canvass, this way and that, its countless might-have-beens. Burton and Fairleigh both knew this, and their avoidance of the topic, the silence concerning it which each kept by unspoken compact with the other, told, more eloquently than words, how heavy was their consciousness that their world had gone woefully awry.

Tommy had threshed the matter out in his own mind over and over again, constantly, ceaselessly, with dreary reiteration. The facts were there, damning and stubborn; there was no twisting them into such guise that they should be made capable of bearing some other interpretation. There was no blinking the truth: Walter Fairleigh, in the face of all his previous splendid record, had shown the white feather, had "funked"

shamelessly, past all forgiveness, in the hour of trial. No one of the three white men had ever been under fire before, and the experience, when endured for the first time, holds many curious and unpleasant sensations calculated to search the soul of the bravest, and to make him conscious of hitherto unsuspected weaknesses. Tommy, fresh from this ordeal, for all he had, in the end, carried himself manfully, knew enough now to be convinced that the proverbial man "who does not know what fear is" has no existence save in the popular fancy, and that if such a one did or could exist, he would of necessity be a singularly stupid person, devoid alike of mind, soul, and the very rudiments of an imagination. Tommy knew what fear was, he told himself—none better! He had felt it in all its raw crudeness on that fatal morning when the sudden outburst of rifle fire had clanged from the underwood, bringing him with a jerk out of his careless light-heartedness into a raging turmoil of strenuous emotions. For a minute or two—for how long exactly he did not know—he had been the most abject coward alive, and when at last he had rushed forward and taken a grip of the men, he had been driven by the goad of a private pain that made him reckless, not by such courage as heroes use. He felt no pride in the little that he had done, because he knew that the deed, such as it was, belonged by rights, not to him, but to Walter Fairleigh. After all, he had been as "badly funky" as Fairleigh—for a time—and the only difference between man and man, he thought, lay in the fact that fear, which was universal, affected various people in

sundry fashions. Some it quickened and stimulated; some it paralysed, as it had paralysed him and Fairleigh, though for longer or shorter periods in individual cases. And, seemingly, it acted with strange caprice, for Walter in the past had given unmistakable proofs of courage, and Tommy still clung to the belief that his friend was at bottom a far braver man than he. Yet this sudden, this dismal failure—how account for it? Dimly Tommy felt that it must be due to some enigmatical, psychological crook in Walter's nature, a puzzle to which the former was for ever seeking the key.

He reviewed again and again all the facts concerning his friend's past achievements of which his recollection held the record. He recalled how he had seen Walter insist upon following up a wounded *gaur*, the terrible wild buffalo of eastern Asia, which had already charged him twice; how he had refused to give the brute's injuries time to stiffen, and how coolly he had awaited and repelled its savage onslaught. Tommy remembered, too, how at the time of the trouble down at Prang Damit the year before, Walter had faced an insolent and more than half-rebellious population for weeks together, unsupported by any sufficient force, with perfect nerve, and had bluffed the hectoring chiefs into complete submission by the sheer weight of his unmoved courage. The natives told many stories of the way in which Fairleigh had chaffed his enemies, jesting, as it were, in the very face of death, and how his gay unconcern had inspired his opponents with the belief that this calm young white man must surely have something at his back of which they were unaware. On that occasion,

at any rate, Walter, standing almost alone, had looked death quite steadily between the eyes, day after day, night after night, and had never so much as shown a sign of flinching. He had proved then that he possessed high courage, courage of the most difficult kind for a man to command—the courage which can sit still and wait, that does not grow cold with the suspense of inaction, that owes nothing to momentary excitement, that requires neither enthusiasm nor romance to quicken and stimulate it. The memory of these things recurred to Tommy now, and he felt, as he had always felt, that in similar circumstances he would not be able to play the man half so triumphantly. Pondering upon Fairleigh's past record, it was almost ludicrous to look upon him as a coward, a poltroon; but how then account for the ghastly fiasco of a week ago? The picture of Walter Fairleigh cowering behind the tree, every line of his figure eloquent of fear, haunted him persistently, and gradually, dimly, gropingly, Tommy began to lay hold upon something in the nature of an explanation. Both when pursuing the buffalo and when facing a hostile countryside, Fairleigh had been prepared, forewarned. In each case, he had known every aspect of the danger to which he was exposed, had been able to forecast its risks, to steel his heart against its every contingency, to hold himself in readiness, to get his nerves thoroughly under control, to be completely on his guard. And, given this grace of preparation, Walter had acquitted himself splendidly. But the ambush had been unexpected, sudden; the danger had burst upon the little force without an instant's warning, like a thunder-

bolt hurled from a cloudless sky; not a second had been allowed in which to steel the heart, control the nerves, and the result had been what it had been.

Yes, Fairleigh had been guilty of cowardice, gross, shameless, unsubdued, but it had been the cowardice of a moment, born of a shock which had thrown him off his balance, had held him in temporary thrall, body and soul; and to Tommy, grown suddenly introspective, it seemed that his own failure differed from that of his friend, not in kind or in degree, but simply in the fortuitous circumstance of its duration. Salmon's stinging words, added to the appalling spectacle of Walter utterly unmanned, had put a period to Tommy's surrender to fear; but the fear had been there, paralysing and besetting, and he had given way to it as completely until a force outside himself had taken hold of him and driven him forward. Tommy could not feel that there was anything to choose between his own conduct and that of his friend; and was the latter's momentary seizure to weigh against years of tried and patient courage, to obliterate in an instant all the record of Walter's heroic struggle to conquer an innate weakness, against all the tremendous self-repression which must have been needed to make his past acts of daring a possibility?

Lying on his mat in the little mess-hut which he shared with Fairleigh, Tommy Burton revolved these things in his mind, making pretence to read the while as an excuse for the silence which had fallen as a curtain between him and his friend. As he had now taught himself to understand the matter, Walter's lapse

amounted to little more than a prolonged *start*, such as robs the strongest momentarily of control over mind and limb. He could not doubt that Walter—given the one essential of time—would have “come again,” would have acted once more with all his old coolness and dash. But time, alas! had been denied, the golden opportunity had been let slip, and that minute or two of weakness, if the secret leaked out, would suffice to brand Fairleigh for all the days of his life. Tommy was convinced that he now judged the matter rightly, that he had fathomed the whole problem, that he, at least, completely understood; but how could he hope to make others see as he saw, and would that clearness of vision, that leniency of judgment ever have been his but for the fact that he, too, had shared Walter’s weakness, had felt the grip of fear about his heart, and for more seconds than he cared to count had stood shaking and impotent, in dread of imminent death? That which was utterly convincing to him, that which seemed at once an explanation and an extenuation, would be scouted by others as arrant nonsense: for Tommy knew that men are wont to judge their fellows on the bald facts, without seeking to get at the psychological complications behind them, and prize nothing so highly as mere brute courage, despise nothing so much as the lack of it. Tommy longed to speak to Fairleigh of his trouble, to tell him that one living being, at any rate, understood and was ready to absolve him, since *tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner*. But the fact that what had befallen stood unconfessed between them added to the shy awkwardness of the young Englishman even with

his closest friend; his hatred of a scene, and his shame at seeming to be betrayed into anything resembling sentimentality, all combined to hold him dumb; wherefore, as the lagging days crept by, no word was spoken, the breach between the youngsters grew wider, and their forced companionship became hourly more embarrassing.

III

A little convoy straggled into camp, the sweating coolies dumping down their loads with grunts of satisfaction, the escort of native soldiers standing around in their stained khaki uniforms, leaning on their rifles, and exchanging news of the outside world with the crowd of sepoys and camp-followers gathered about them. A soiled canvas mail bag was carried into the mess-hut, and as soon as directions had been given for the housing of the stores brought in by the convoy, and the billeting of the new arrivals, Burton and Fairleigh fell to sorting out their letters. There were a few parcels of newspapers and magazines, a book or two, some precious bundles of home letters—the best and most perfect gift that ever the exile knows—half-a-dozen long envelopes containing instructions or formal information as to stores dispatched, a dozen local news-sheets, and a handful of private letters franked “On Service.” Burton and Fairleigh, each bearing an armful of his correspondence, retired to their sleeping mats, and fell to the reading of envelopes and the devouring of letters in an absorbed silence. It was Tommy’s practice to save his home letters to the very end, and

therefore he began by examining the less interesting piles whose envelopes bore local postmarks. One, two, three, four of these he opened, glanced at, read a line or two, and tossed aside, but the fifth riveted his attention. It was in the well-known scrawl of John Thurston, the man who held the post of District Officer in the little up-country station whither the wounded Salmon had been sent. It was dated a day or two earlier, and ran as follows:

MY DEAR TOMMY:

I am sending this up by the convoy which starts at day-break. We are hustling things all we can down here, and ought to have four decent columns in the field to coöperate with your fellows by the end of the month. Until then, I fancy, you will have to sit tight; but old Stiggings, who is here, and very much the busy worker—you know his winning way—is sending you detailed instructions, he tells me, by this mail. When the time comes for scrapping, I very much fear that I shall be out of it, stuck down here doing nothing but base work, which is a sell; but I am trying my damndest to get put on to one of the columns as political officer. You, anyway, will be in the thick of the fun—you always were one of the lucky ones; so, if I am not there, rub it into the worthy *dakaitis* with my love, and make the little beggars sit up and snort. You owe them one in the eye on your own account for ambushing you the other day.

That reminds me. Salmon got in here all right, and Seaton is as pleased with his wounded thigh as a child with a new toy. He says the bullet hole is “quite beautiful.” Salmon had pretty high fever on him when he came in, and he talked the most awful rot to Seaton and the hospital dressers both then and later when he came to after the chloroform. He did the same when old Stiggings went to see him. I was present, and longed to give the bounder the kicking he de-

served, in spite of his game leg. After that, Mrs. Arthur and Mrs. Grant undertook to nurse him, and he talked to them, too; so now, as you may imagine, the yarn is all over the place. He is full of a cock-and-bull story about Fairleigh, of all men—utter bosh, of course. He swears that Fairleigh funk'd badly when the *dakait's* went for you; that he got behind a tree himself, tried to call the men off, and played the fool generally. Of course, any one who knows Fairleigh (and Salmon) doesn't need to be told that this is about as bad a lie as they make; but that cad Salmon has been gassing to every soul he has seen since he was brought in, and now the thing has contrived to make its way even into old Stiggings's understanding, and nothing can prise the notion that there "must be something in it" out of that thick skull of his. I would have written to Fairleigh myself, but it seemed like an insult, so I pass it on to you instead; and do, for God's sake, do something to put a stop once for all to this woman's tattle. You know how a story of this sort *clings*—how it sticks to a man for all his service, unless it is squashed right on the nail. Now that that bounder Salmon—the chap always was an outsider of the most outrageous breed—has gone and made all this mess, and old Stiggings is sticking his nose into it, it just has to be wiped up, and the sooner the better; so wade in like a good fellow, and put matters square again. Keep your tail up.

With heaps of luck,

Yours always,
JOHN THURSTON.

Tommy read this letter through twice with a heavy heart, and then passed on to the perusal of the rest of his correspondence; but Thurston's news rose up again and again, like an obscuring mist, between his understanding and the scribbled pages, and even home letters were powerless to lure his mind away from the one absorbing subject that engrossed his every faculty.

So Salmon had been talking—talking like the babbling Jew-boy that he was! He had not contented himself with “firing in” an official report (in the circumstances some men might have thought themselves bound in duty to do that, no matter how odious the task might be), but must needs yarn at large about Fairleigh, well pleased, doubtless, as small natures are wont to be, to discover flaws in those who are their moral superiors. So, at least, thought Tommy Burton, musing in bitterness over “the mess that must be wiped up.” And what a mess it was! An official report might or might not have been treated seriously; but it had got beyond that, for with Salmon gossiping with the women, “gassing” to the native dressers, and making a cad and beast of himself in every conceivable way, the story must by now have become a thing of public notoriety no longer to be shirked or blinked. Tommy had half-expected something of the sort, but the immensity of the disaster, now that it had actually befallen, overwhelmed him, and the sting of it all lay in the fact that, curse him though he might, Salmon had in the main spoken only the ugly, naked truth as he understood it!

It was not until after the lights had been put out and the two men were settling down to sleep, each on his mat at opposite sides of the little mess-hut, that Tommy at last broached the subject of the letter to his friend.

“Fairleigh,” he said, and even to his own ears his voice in the darkness sounded strange and harsh, “I got a letter from Thurston to-day.”

“Did you?” said Fairleigh. Tommy fancied that his voice, too, was constrained and unnatural.

"Salmon has been talking—talking all over the shop."

"What about?"

"About the fight."

"Oh!"

Tommy tried again.

"Upon my soul, that chap is a bounder!" he exclaimed.

"He is all that," Fairleigh assented.

"He has sent in an official report, of course. I felt sure he would do that."

"Yes."

"But he has been talking at large, too, to the doctor, to the dressers, to Mrs. Arthur and Mrs. Grant."

"Has he? What has he been saying?" Tommy could hear Walter breathing hard and tugging at his extinguished pipe with all his might.

"For God's sake, man, don't make it harder than it is already," cried Tommy, jerking himself into a sitting posture on his mat, and speaking with a passionate ring in his voice. "You must know what he has been saying."

"I am not sure that I do. You had better tell me," said Fairleigh chillingly.

"He says that you funked, then, if you want to know; that you got behind a tree, and tried to call the men off; that you wouldn't lead them; that you showed the white feather."

There was a silence, and then Fairleigh spoke suddenly. "Did you see me?" he asked, and his voice choked in the darkness.

Then Tommy Burton told one of the few deliberate lies of his life. "No," he said huskily, "I didn't see you."

Again silence fell upon the hut, a silence broken only by the hard breathing of the two men and by the ticking of the jungle insects in the forest without the camp.

"You are a good little beggar, Tommy, as staunch and as loyal as they make 'em," said Walter presently. "But—but you are a poor liar. So you saw, too, did you?"

Once more the silence fell heavily, and Tommy could hear his friend refilling his pipe. Presently, the flare of a match lit up his drawn, fixed face, the light cast from below painting it with tints ghastly as those of a corpse. Some men would smoke tobacco, from sheer force of habit, even on the rack; Walter Fairleigh was one of them.

"We've been good pals, you and I, Tommy," he said at last, "and we've seen times together, good and bad. That is all ended now, like everything else. Don't interrupt, old man; talking won't mend it. I don't suppose that there ever were two men, thrown together in a God-forgotten cranny of the world as we have been, with only their two selves for company, and with nothing to break the blank monotony of it all, who hit it off much better than we have done."

"They could not have got on *better*," said Tommy, with conviction.

"I know; and that means that we have given each other, well, say, fifty per cent. of our confidence, which is about a hundred times more than one friend usually

gives another. But even when a man is closest to you, there is always the little hard ring of self fencing you about; the impassable barrier which encircles each soul walls in the appalling solitude of each individual identity, the barrier that nothing can win through. I have felt it, have brought up sheer against it, scores of times, even with you, Tommy; and I have always known more than a bit of the ugly secrets which in my case it guarded. One of these—the worst, I hope and believe—is out now, a secret no longer. It is that I am a funk-stick! Don't interrupt, Tommy, don't perjure yourself unnecessarily; let us call things by their right names for once. Do you think that I don't know? Do you think that I haven't known it all along?"

"But, Walter," Tommy protested vehemently, "your pluck has been proverbial. You have given proofs, any number of times. You have never shown a trace of the white feather in all your life until—until——"

"I know!" interrupted Fairleigh savagely. "I know! What rot it all is! I tell you that I have known myself for an arrant coward any time these ten years past; only the occasion has been wanting to convince others of that which I already knew. Now the occasion has come."

"You remember the Vardons?" Walter presently resumed. "But of course you do; we have spoken of them scores of times. And you remember Elsie Vardon?"

"Yes," said Tommy, "I remember Elsie Vardon."

"We have not spoken of her so much."

"No," echoed Tommy huskily, "we have not spoken of her so much."

"Well, I am letting you into all my secrets to-night, so I may as well tell you this one, too. Elsie and I had meant to marry each other some day. That is all ended now, too, I suppose, like everything else."

"Do you mean that you were actually engaged?" asked Tommy, who still, seemingly, found it difficult to command his voice.

"Yes. We were waiting to break it to her people until I had got my company. It was bound to be a blow to them, you see, any way; but I could have come forward with a trifle less indecency then, as I had a good chance of getting my step with barely six years' service, and so should have been pretty safe to command the Regiment, if I did nothing better." Already, unconsciously, he spoke in the past tense.

"But you weren't engaged to her when we were home together on leave?"

"No, not regularly. But you remember how I ran down to Craddock to say good-bye to the Vardons a day or two before we sailed? Well, I spoke to her then."

"I see," said Tommy, more huskily than ever.

"Oh, Tommy boy, you don't know what a saint, what a little brick that girl is!" cried Walter, his voice in the darkness vibrating with the intensity of his enthusiasm. "She always was worlds too good for me, or for any man; but you can't think how many tight places the thought of her has pulled me through! I should have been shown up scores of times—but for her, but for what the memory of her made of me! Down at Prang Damit, I—the real *I*—was in a shuddering funk

every hour of the day and night; but Elsie, in spirit, was at my elbow all the while, and I was playing to the gallery, the gallery of which she was the sole occupant; and so I brought the thing off—in spite of myself! I got *kudos* for that, but it wasn't mine by rights. It was hers, every bit of it, and I knew it, if nobody else did. It was the same with big-game shooting. I had always plenty of time—time in which to remember Elsie and what she would have had me do, time in which to feel her close beside me, making a man of me, bless her! And fellows thought that I was a good-plucked 'un, thanks to her—even you thought so, who knew me better than most; but I never had any illusions on the subject. And then, in that beastly little scrap the other morning, I hadn't a second in which to think of anything except my own infernal skin, and for once the real I came uppermost and made an indecent exhibition of itself."

"It wasn't your real self," said Tommy loyally, though the words cost him much. "Your real self was the man who faced his fears squarely, and beat them every time till—— The brush with the *dakait*s doesn't count. It was a chance, an accident. You hadn't time!"

"Thank you, Tommy," said Walter gratefully, but his tone had in it no conviction, no throb of relief. The movement of the glow cast from his pipe bowl upon the darkness showed that he was shaking his head in lugubrious despair.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Tommy, after a long pause.

"Do? What is there left for me to do? I sha'n't send in my papers, though I mayn't be fit to hold the King's commission. I shall ask for a Court of Inquiry, and shall make as good a fight of it as I can, as every man must do when he is fighting for his life. Then, in the fulness of time, I shall be 'broken' decently and according to Cocker and the King's Regulations, as many a better and a worse man than I has been broken before me."

"Yes," said Tommy meditatively, "I suppose you must apply for an inquiry—that there is no other way out of it. It is the soundest thing you can do."

"Quite. And if one has to go under, one may as well do it in order and with due ceremony. Salmon will have got thoroughly into practice for telling that pretty story of his by that time," said Fairleigh, with a spiritless attempt to treat his tragedy lightly.

"Damn him!" cried Tommy, with hearty emphasis.

"Damn him by all manner of means, but his evidence will serve to damn me first. He will cook my hash right enough, and that, I suppose, is all that the beggar wants."

"I'm not so sure of that. Courts of this kind are very chary of bringing in a verdict of 'Guilty.' Besides, Salmon will have prejudiced his case badly by babbling about it to Tom, Dick, and Harry. If he had behaved like any one else and had just sent in an official report, he would have been far more dangerous. He is your junior to begin with; they know that he made a row about having to serve under you; and now he has played the cad for all the world to see. His part

of the business will look uncommon ugly in the eyes of any board they may appoint."

"Yes—perhaps," admitted Fairleigh dubiously. "But any stick is good enough to flog a coward with. Besides, he won't be the only witness."

"They won't call native evidence," said Tommy quickly. "They never do in cases where a white man is concerned. It is bad for discipline. I bet you anything you like that not a single one of the men is examined. Even if they were called, they wouldn't give you away."

"I wonder. But, Tommy, you'll have to give evidence."

"Yes."

"And you'll have to tell the truth, too, mind," said Fairleigh excitedly, almost savagely. "You'll be on oath. You won't be able to lie then as you lied just now to me. God bless you for it, though it wasn't any sort of use."

"Yes," answered Tommy, with a catch in his voice. "Yes, God help me, I shall have to tell the truth—as I know it!"

And after that the silence of the night fell and remained unbroken till the dawning of the day.

IV

The conversation in the darkness which, mercifully hiding the faces of the speakers, had rendered Walter's confessions and confidences unwontedly easy to make, drew the two friends closer than ever before. On the morrow, though the sense of catastrophe still weighed

upon them, depressing their spirits and robbing life of its spring, its joyousness, the unendurable constraint which had made of the past week a veritable nightmare had vanished. Each went about his work with a certain mechanical energy, but neither tried now to spin out the hours that could thus be occupied, because he dreaded to find himself alone with his friend. Instead, the old familiar comradeship was renewed with more than its ancient strength, with an intimacy greater than of yore, for Walter, now that the flood gates of his reserve had been once flung wide, was able to talk openly of all that he had hoped, of all that he had dreamed and longed for, of all that he had so nearly won, of all that he deemed he had lost hopelessly through one moment of fear and weakness. And Tommy, who believed himself to be tasting all the bitterness of the world, listened patiently and with understanding, although many of Walter's confidences hurt him badly. He had lain awake, tossing on his mat, till the daybreak thrust long gray fingers into the tumble-down mess-hut and the bugle blew a discordant reveille through the camp, and during all those lonely, silent hours he had been torn by pain and doubt. The thought of Elsie Vardon had been with him first, for, little by little, imperceptibly, almost unknown to him, the dream of her had crept into his heart till her girlish figure had become the centre round which all things revolved, the beginning and the end of the life which for him had been made cleaner and more honest by the memory of her purity. The extent to which the thought and hope of her had come to fill his horizon

had never been realized until Walter's words had suddenly shattered the aërial castle in which he had placed her; but now he knew that these things had become for him the very soul of life, that, lacking them, existence were a dead, unhappy waste. At first, the sheer pain of it numbed and absorbed him; he was conscious only of a great self-pity because the best gift of God (for such he held it) had been denied to him. He was very young, and the loss seemed irreparable. He was too inexperienced to know how quickly the deepest love wounds heal for the most of men, how very easily so many broken hearts are mended, and it seemed to him, lying wide-eyed in the darkness, that life, or all of life that mattered, was ended for him here and now. He could never love any one like that again (here once more spoke youth and inexperience); and, mourning over the extinction of his own farthing dip, he fancied that the sun's light had failed in the heavens.

But very soon his mind fitted itself into the new groove, and he began to make terms with the inevitable. It never so much as occurred to him that Walter's disgrace might mean his own opportunity. Elsie Vardon was still the ideal that his fancy had painted her, and her love once given to his friend, he felt convinced that that gift was made for all time. She had chosen Walter, preferring him before his fellows; she loved him, and this knowledge invested the matter of Walter's welfare with a new and tremendous importance. No man lived who could be found worthy of Elsie Vardon, Tommy thought, yet if Fairleigh had been all that a week earlier Tommy had

dreamed him, he had been less unworthy than the vast majority of the men he knew. And even now, with that ugly blemish on his fair repute, was he not a better man than Tommy, a better man than ninety per cent. of his fellows? And did it matter much what he was since Elsie loved him and Tommy knew him to be one well fitted to love and cherish her?

Tommy's talk with his friend had left him more convinced than ever that Walter, let his faults be what they might, approximated more nearly to the hero of his imagination than to the poltroon who had disgraced himself on that terrible morning. Tommy had idealized him, of course, and knew now that this was so; but he felt that he was sure of him, could vouch for his soundness at bottom, and since Elsie loved him, since her happiness was bound up in his, did aught else matter? Tommy had never spoken a word to her of love, though he had dreamed that that word would one day be spoken. She would never know how he had loved her, Fairleigh, too, would never guess; yet was it not in his power to save her and him from heavy sorrow? He, to all intents and purposes, since Salmon had prejudiced his case, was the only witness against his friend, against Elsie's lover, which the Court would call. It was over this knowledge that Tommy fought out his bitterest struggle.

"Yes, God help me, I must tell the truth—as I know it!" he had said, and now, "What is truth?" he asked, as hopelessly, as little mirthfully as "jesting Pilate" himself, like him addressing his question to the living God.

“For truth is this to thee, and that to me,
And truth, or clothed or naked, let it be!”

he thought. It seemed to him that, in the light of the full understanding of his friend's blended strength and weakness which he alone possessed, something very near to the abstract truth had been revealed; yet how make that truth, as he saw it, plain to others? For this, the essential truth, was none the less truth clothed and draped, while truth, mother-naked, as those would judge it who did not really *know*, was still the truth, damning and terrible, although, he miserably felt, it was by no means the whole truth. The impossibility of putting Fairleigh's case before his judges in such a fashion that they should see it, as Tommy was convinced he saw it, aright, was patent, and during the long watches of the night, Tommy tossed restlessly upon his mat, wondering what he could do. Then, just before the dawn, an idea came to him, and as he turned it over in his mind, his cheek was flushed by the glow that comes with the magnanimity of a splendid self-immolation. It was for Elsie's sake, and for her sake nothing was too hard; moreover, he would be fulfilling his duty and telling the truth—as he knew it!

And so, with the breaking day, peace came to Tommy Burton.

V

Another week crawled away, and then once more a convoy straggled into camp. In command of it came an officer to relieve Fairleigh, so as to set him at liberty to attend the sittings of the Court of Inquiry for which

he had applied. Mr. Burton, the orders stated, could not be spared from his post, as, in time of trouble, a political officer possessed of local knowledge cannot easily be replaced. Mr. Burton, therefore, must send in a written statement for the information of the Court. Tommy had foreseen this, but he was glad that his anticipations had been fulfilled. His written statement, unknown to Fairleigh, was ready, and Fate was making smooth the path which he had determined to tread.

Walter left the camp next morning, and Tommy bore him company a mile or two upon his way. Then they parted with a firm hand-grip and a few words, each looking into the other's eyes with a new-born gravity, and some foreknowledge, perhaps, that they would never meet again.

"Remember, you have promised to breathe no word of all this trouble in your letters to Miss Vardon until the Court has brought in its finding," were almost the last words that Tommy spoke. "Remember that, and keep your pecker up. You'll come out on the top all right."

"Not I!" said Walter stolidly. This parting with his friend—the one man who understood and to some extent forgave—seemed to him like the weighing of the last anchor that still held him to the old life. Ahead lay a sea of darkness, upon which, for the remainder of his days, he would drift and toss, a human dervish.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, old man, and don't give yourself away," said Tommy, his slang covering more

deep feeling than he knew what to do with. "Good-bye, and good luck go with you!"

"Good-bye, Tommy," said Walter huskily. "You've been a brick. Whatever happens, you've helped me tremendously all these days. But remember, you've made a promise, too—to tell the truth."

"Yes," said Tommy, as he turned to go. "To tell the truth." And so they separated.

And in the mail bags with Fairleigh's escort went Tommy's official statement, and this is how it read:

BANAT CAMP, *April 15, 19—.*

SIR:

In accordance with instructions received, I have the honour to make the following statement for the information of the Court of Inquiry applied for by Lieutenant Fairleigh, concerning the action which took place on the 1st instant.

2. We left Lepas at 6:30 A. M. on that day, with fifty men of the —th Native Infantry, the party being under the command of Lieutenant Fairleigh, with Lieutenant Salmon as second in command. I accompanied the force as political officer.

3. At about 7:30 A. M., a succession of volleys was fired into us by the enemy posted in thick thorn scrub on a hill some twenty yards to our right flank. I saw Lieutenant Salmon fall at the first volley. He seemed to think that I had struck him with my stick, and he shouted in a very excited manner. None of us had ever been under fire before, the attack was very sudden, and we were taken completely by surprise. Speaking for myself, I am obliged to admit that the shock of the attack bewildered and unnerved me. I remember standing quite still, looking about me, hardly understanding what had happened, and I confess that I was afraid. I caught sight of Lieutenant Fairleigh at this moment, but after what I have had to admit concerning my

own sensations, I think the Court will understand that I was not in a condition to form any opinion as to the behaviour of others. After that, I believe, I ran forward to where the men were firing, and we all made our way through the thorn jungle to the top of the hill, which the *dakails* made no attempt to hold. During this advance I did not see Lieutenant Fairleigh. The underwood was very dense, and it is quite possible that he may have taken part in the charge without my seeing him.

4. I have known Lieutenant Fairleigh for the last three or four years, and I have always had good reason to believe him to be a man of high courage.

I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient servant,

THOMAS BARRINGTON BURTON,
Political Officer attached to A Column.

Tommy had read this statement through more than once before he signed it, and as he read, he had winced as though the words hurt him. At the last, however, he had scrawled his name at its foot with a firm pen, and had watched the convoy which bore the mail bag containing it pass out of camp almost without a pang, and with barely so much as a strangled wish to recall it. After all, he thought, it was the truth; he *had* been frightened, badly frightened, and who was he to judge of the conduct of others? Besides, it was the only way in which the Court could be brought to the one conclusion which (or so Tommy persuaded himself) was the true finding concerning Walter Fairleigh. And what did it matter if it entailed the sacrifice of himself and his reputation for *the* virtue which all men prize above aught else? Nothing mattered very much now, Tommy thought, except the happiness of a girl far away

across the seas—happiness which was bound up in that of his friend and in which Tommy himself could never have a share.

The Court of Inquiry held its sittings in private, acquitted Walter Fairleigh, and furnished a confidential report recommending that Salmon should be severely reprimanded. His allegations, the Court declared, had broken down hopelessly, the only unprejudiced witness having himself admitted that he was too much under the influence of fear to be able to judge of the conduct of those about him, and there being no shred of evidence, beyond Salmon's bare statement, to show that Fairleigh had belied on this occasion the reputation which he had already won. The fact that Salmon had been wounded and was presumably beside himself with pain was urged in extenuation of his action in bringing so serious a charge upon such flimsy grounds, and the Court reminded its superiors that "Mr. Burton was present in a civil capacity, and that taking an active part in the engagement formed no portion of his duty." The Court made mention, too, of the statements concerning Tommy's dash and boldness, volunteered by Salmon and Fairleigh alike, but they preferred to accept the youngster's own version, partly because it afforded them an easy escape from the performance of an unpleasant duty, partly because, to the military mind, lack of courage in a mere civilian is a matter of slight importance, and partly because they could not conceive of a man gratuitously "giving himself away" in this fashion in any circumstances that

could present themselves to their imaginations unless he were impelled to do so by remorseful conscience.

Walter Fairleigh had protested furiously against Tommy's self-accusations, but the Court had smiled at his generous enthusiasm and had calmly refused to listen. Even when he was publicly and triumphantly acquitted, he did not wholly understand the grounds upon which the Court had acted, but he promised himself that he would "have it out with Tommy" when chance next threw them into each other's company. The opportunity, however, never came, for, during the troubles that followed, Tommy Burton, exposing himself with wanton recklessness in the foremost firing line (where, as political officer, he had no sort of business to be), rolled over suddenly into the under scrub with a *dakait's* bullet through his skull, and so passed onward to put his anxious query, "What is truth?" to God upon His judgment seat.

ALONE: A STORY OF VERY EARLY DAYS IN BORNEO

THE big man-of-war floundered along the coast of North Borneo, heaving ponderously as the swell dandled her upon its mighty knee. To the officer leaning against the stanchion of the bridge, and looking aft and downward, she was merely a squat arrangement of sagging oblongs of awning, spread at varying levels, from the broad sheet upon the poop to the canvas above the main deck at his feet. Twin yellow funnels, belching sparks, rose amidships like a brace of factory chimneys; the masts ran upward into the night bare and naked, stayed by shadowy rigging; the raised gangway connecting the poop with the lower bridge showed like a narrow ribbon stretched fore and aft above the bellying squares of awning. In the intense moonlight of the tropics all these things threw blue shadows against the dead whiteness of the masses of canvas upon which they seemed to rest.

Beneath those awnings, the officer knew, there lay a little world, complete in itself—with its king, now snoring snugly in his bunk; its prime minister, the first lieutenant; its ministers of state; its little population of workers, fighters, and artisans; even its convicts in its tiny jail. Down in the bowels of the ship, far below sea level, men toiled during that quiet night, stripped to the

waist and sweating at every pore, as they fed the hungry engines, just as men toil underground who work on night shifts in a mine. Elsewhere, in dimly lighted corridors, amid the butts of big guns, other men lay at rest, swung from the deck above them in canvas hammocks, a lounging marine in white uniform watching over their slumbers. Elsewhere still, others sat at their posts awake, waiting listlessly for the hour which would bring them relief. The officer could picture so clearly every detail of the teeming, invisible life which lay below him concealed by those awnings—the very attitude of the sleeping men, with arms pressed closely to breast by the sides of their hammocks; the purr and murmur of even breaths broken now and again by an occasional knotty snore; the faces, sleeping or waking, pale beneath the electric light; the orderly litter of the ship's furniture; the overheated atmosphere; the monotonous silence, disturbed once in a while by the swift patter of bare feet, and the fresh young voice of a midshipman making his nocturnal report to “Mr. Thompkins, sir!” This little world, of which he was a part, was to the officer a thing terribly familiar, for the ship had been his home for nearly three years. The sameness, the lack of incident or excitement, the deadly immutability of each week's routine, oppressed him bitterly, sawing at his nerves until at times he felt inclined to scream aloud. It was such a limited life, walled in by a few hundred feet of armour-plated bulwarks, shut off from the rest of creation by that narrow barrier. No matter whither he might wander, no matter whither duty might take him, he carried with

him always that iron-bound home from which there was seemingly no escape, which, let its surroundings be what they might, was itself ever unchanging, always confined, cramped, monotonous, and dull. Why, he asked himself, was he condemned to pass the best years of his life in the belly of a man-made machine while other folks lived untrammelled lives in God's own free world, with the open sky replacing the few square yards of awning, and the vast wilderness of the earth at their feet through which they might roam at will?

As he looked down now at the heaving thing swathed in its flats of canvas, foreshortened wonderfully in perspective, it seemed meaner, smaller, more woefully limited in space than ever before, and the gazer found himself involuntarily gasping for breath, as though confinement in such a prison choked him.

A barefooted quartermaster pattered up the bridge ladder and muttered something incomprehensible in what might well have passed for some unknown language; but the officer apparently understood him, for he answered with a grunt, and turning his back upon the ship, leaned outward over the rail staring into the night. Before him lay the coast of Borneo bathed in a wonder of tender moonlight. In the foreground were half-a-dozen dainty islands, which seemed to lie afloat upon the surface of the sea, tiny masses of foliage ringed about by even belts of sand, which showed milk-white under the moon. Behind them, a long rippling line of equal whiteness marked the beach of the mainland, and behind that again rose pile upon pile of low hills smothered in jungle, tumbling pell-mell away to the broken

sky-line. Here, suddenly, out of the undulations of the hill-strewn plain, the slopes of Kinabalu ran heavenward in a long gradual incline, straight and gentle, but firm, culminating in the vast bulk of the greatest mountain in Borneo, a magnificent, eye-filling, soul-satisfying mass of blackness, its face falling sheer to the western sea, its score of peaks and crests silhouetted boldly in jagged fretwork against the moon glow.

The sharpness of the contrast between the cramped ship and the splendid spaciousness of this sample chunk of the great free universe was so extraordinary, so abrupt and sudden, so keenly felt, that once more the officer of the bridge gasped for breath; but this time it was because the immensity, and the fascination which it had for him, caught him by the throat, throttling him as with a tangible grip. Here were the things for which from his heart he craved!—the wildness, the vastness, the limitless freedom, all the delights which, as he pictured them, went to make up that life under open skies, in silent forest places, alone, save for a thin trickle of brown humanity through the woodlands—beings sad, mysterious, whose presence only emphasized the stillness—all the things that were beginning to call him to themselves with a voice that grew daily more insistent, more persuasive. After spending so many years of his young life in crowded ships, where a man could not even step out boldly without treading upon some one of his fellows, the gigantic, inviolate solitude of the land before him was its most potent spell and charm. Here were elbow room and scope! Here a man might live after the fashion of his primitive fore-

bears, as nature intended that a man should live! For one who had seen overmuch of his caste-mates at quarters too close for comfort, the notion of "herding with narrow foreheads" could hold no terrors. The revolt against things as they are voiced in the outburst of the town-bred hero of "Locksley Hall" came to the youngster's mind, thrilling him, and he repeated the words aloud in a sort of ecstatic rhapsody:

I will take some savage woman—she shall rear my dusky
race.
Iron-jointed, supple-sinew'd, they shall dive, and they shall
run,
Catch the wild goat by the hair, and cast their lances in the
sun,
Whistle back the parrot's call, and leap the rainbow of the
brooks,
Not with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books!

The wild words fascinated him; their rocking lilt set the time to the throb of his own heart. Ah, it would be good, good, good to be there—out there in the darkness—a free man in a world of marvellous freedom! "Oh, my God, I want it so!" he cried, dropping from the words of the great poet into the broken prose which men use for the framing of their innermost thoughts. "Give it to me some day! Let me look upon Thy glory a little before I die!"

"It's seven bells, Mr. Bazelgate, sir," said a middy at his elbow.

"Damn!" snapped Bazelgate, annoyed at the abrupt interruption, and then to himself, "Time to alter

course." He looked outward once more to the jungle-smothered mainland across the moonlit sea, and tore his eyes away again as men do when with pain they force themselves to gaze no more upon the face of one who is very dear and will soon be very distant.

It does not often come to pass in this workaday world that a man wins, while young blood yet runs warmly, to the realization of his heart's desire, but Cyril Bazelgate was seemingly one of the favoured few to whom this gift of the gods is granted. Within two years from the time when, as he sailed among the islands of the Eastern seas, he gazed so wistfully at the unknown wildernesses, the death of a distant relative placed him in possession of a certain sum of ready money, sufficient to enable him to quit the navy and to turn his face once more to the jungles which, in imagination, he had learned to love. The idea of those silent forests waiting for him, half a world away, with their myriad arms outstretched in welcome, thrilled him as of old; but he went to them less gladly than in the past he could have conceived possible, for, in the interval which had elapsed, She had come.

For each one of the strong band of exiles that crowd the ships which stream in endless procession toward the sunrise, there is ever a She—a dear being about whose memory our thoughts play ceaselessly, lingering over the past, picturing the might-have-beens; a being too sacred and too tender to be spoken of, save on rare occasions when sympathy has set the flood gates of the soul ajar; a being whose invisible presence keeps us

clean, warms our secret hearts, nerves us to our struggles, is responsible for the best of our manful resolutions—that woeful pie crust too often made to be broken—and serves us as a rudder on the troubled waters of our ways. This She is ever an impossible creation of loving fancy, endowed with more beauties of soul and body than can conceivably find a place in one frail human being; but if she approximate, even a little, to the ideal which each one of us carries treasured in his heart, and if she have fair average stuff to work upon, you may mark her acting as the driving power at the back of her lover's heart. She rowels the ambitious, spurs the indolent, bestows unlooked-for gifts with lavish hand—energy to the idle, enthusiasm to the *blasé*, the soul of poetry to the most prosaic, courage to the faint-hearted, a splendid recklessness to the hero—all with the magic of the fairy godmothers of the sweet old nursery tales. Even though she be a bad woman, she may yet do good; for it harms no man to serve an ideal on his knees until such time as he may learn his mistake. By then, if the gods be kind, she may unwittingly have wrought the good she knew not of, and her man may be fit to stand alone, or to worship at some more worthy shrine. Be she good or bad, plain or beautiful, clever or foolish, she bears only one name—to each one of us She is the Girl at Home.

For Cyril Bazelgate, the Girl at Home occupied a vast space in the horizon of life. The money which had been left to him was not sufficient to enable him to think of marriage yet a while, but by turning to the jungles—his first love—he hoped to be able to increase

his capital so speedily that his greater, more solemn passion might also soon be gratified. There seemed to him to be something fateful in the longing for the Eastern forests which had stirred him so strongly, as though his path had been marked out for him from the beginning of time. It was meet and just that the jungles should yield to him their riches, that he might lay them at the feet of the Girl. He had learned something of the wealth of those vast solitudes; of the timber which finds so ready a market in China; of the gums, the camphor, the agila wood, and the tangles of rattan. Most of the latter products, he was aware, were worked almost exclusively by natives, but the timber trade was in the hands of Europeans. This would give him the opening he sought. His small capital would serve to start him fairly on the road to success, and the period of waiting, that must still separate him from the realization of the hopes which clustered about the Girl, would be passed in the silent wilderness, which still had the power to draw him to itself with irresistible force. Thus it befell that in the fulness of time Cyril Bazelgate reached the shores of British North Borneo, and landed at Sandakan, the capital of the Chartered Company's territory.

At this point, a deep indentation in the eastern coast forms an irregularly shaped bay, narrow at the entrance, widening out later, and dwindling away to nothing again some seven miles inshore. The town, as I see it to-day, is a thriving busy place, full of life and movement and colour. It is situated near the entrance, and spreads along the northern coast of the bay, skirting

the beach, running out into the sea on piles, swarming up the jungle-clad hills, and overflowing east and west. A small fort and a large block of jail buildings stand on a red bluff, solitary and conical shaped, forming the northern portal of the bay. Behind this bluff, slender valleys run inland amid a pack of jostling hills, with here and there a ruddy cliff rising erect and gaunt from out the smother of foliage. The face of the hills is spattered over with bungalows, which cling to the slopes like limpets to a rock, and is ringed about and about by bands of rich red earth, the cuttings which mark the lines of tortuous roadways. The bungalows are of European type, thatched, for the most part, for the sake of coolness, but with a red-tiled roof pricking up its shoulder here and there. Seen from a distance, they have the air of dolls' houses, and they seem to be half embedded in moss, so closely does the foliage of the tropical growths cluster about them. Here the white wooden spire of the Roman Catholic church hangs on by its eyelids to the face of a scarp; lower down the valley, on the summit of a hill made level for its reception, the Protestant church rears gray walls of stone. At the foot of the bungalow-bespattered hills, on a narrow strip of foreshore, are clubs and tennis lawns, and the business houses of the place, standing back a little from the crowds of Chinese shops which line the sea, in company with wharves and jetties, custom houses and markets. Native boats manned by Sûlus and Bâjaus and Ilânuns, the sons of pirates, and themselves the best blackguards in the Eastern Archipelago, loll upon the tide, rocking and jostling, rubbing sides with

strange-shaped junks from China, steam-launches, ocean-going ships, and unsightly little coasting tramps. In the magnificent harbour, big cargo boats lie at noisy rest, with creaking derricks and rattling donkey engines. Tiny canoes dart this way and that amid the shipping, and the constant passing to and fro of gaily dressed natives, joined to the restless motion of every atom of greenery on the hillsides as the fresh sea breezes set it shivering, imparts to the whole scene an extraordinary air of life, motion, and brightness.

This town is one of the unconsidered miracles which the energy of the white men is for ever working in Asia. Five-and-twenty years ago, it did not exist; there was not even a village to mark the site of the present capital of North Borneo. The bay was an empty cranny of the Eastern seas, with the sad still forests shutting it in, and the calm waters reflecting the blinding sun glare, with a few listless sea fowl skimming over it, and a solitary kite revolving slowly high up in the heavens. From the beginning of the world, that bay had slept in slumber as deep as that which wrapped the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, unvisited save by an occasional wind-driven *prâhu*, the haunt of the *mâyas*, the man monkey, of the wild swine, and the slender speckled deer. Then, of a sudden, the fairy prince, the white man, broke upon that solitude and kissed it into life, and the place without a history became the living centre of a little world.

When Cyril Bazelgate came to Sandakan, it was still in its infancy, a tiny townlet struggling out of its bed-clothes of greenery and striving to stand erect on its

untried feet; but to the man who had dreams of savagery its very newness was to him an added fascination. It seemed to bring him into close contact with things elemental, to enable him to realize the beginning of the world with all its mysteries. Across the bay lay the eternal forest—the forest of his dreams—silent, melancholy, where no man set foot from year's end to year's end, and where one might live the life of a hermit with only inviolate nature for a friend, and the memory of the Girl at Home to make glad the solitary hours.

The new-made township could not hold him, for his restlessness drove him on and out. He lost no time in making the necessary arrangements with the authorities, in purchasing the gear which he needed, in buying a native sailing craft, and in engaging a dozen shock-headed Bâjaus to aid him in his work. Then he set sail in the canting boat for the opposite shores of the bay, and the wilderness swallowed him up.

For a time all went well with him. He built a couple of huts—one for himself and one for his men—using the materials which the jungle placed so readily at his disposal; he found that the timber on every hand exceeded his wildest dreams, though it often went to his heart to fell some mighty forest monarch which had withstood the ravages of time so gallantly; his men worked well and cheerily, and his hopes of wealth seemed in a fair way to be realized. As balk after balk of splendid red or yellow wood was dragged down to the banks of the stream on which his camp was situated, it seemed to him that one more stone was added to the edifice of his

happiness, the happiness which he would share with the Girl at Home. For the rest, the fascination which the forest had always held for him was as strong upon him as of old. As he sat by day listening to the ringing axes of his men, all the half-heard whispers of the woodland told wonderful stories to his ears. As he lay at evening upon his rude bunk, the ticking of the tree insects, the bark of a deer, the flutter of some night bird spoke of the splendid solitudes around him and filled him with a deep content. Later, as the still hours drew on toward the dawn, he would awake and listen to the hum of secret life, the purr of the living jungle, and his oneness with nature in her mysterious temple would thrill him with a keen delight. His eyes were clear to see all the beauties of this untouched world. He was constantly making some new discovery, learning some cherished secret of the forest; and each new sight, each new sound, that had for him its intimate meaning, added yet another pleasure to the fulness of his life. He began to dream dreams of a time when he should be able to bring Her to these lovely woodlands, to show Her the things which held for him so dear a delight. How She would revel in the beauty, the wonder of it all! How easily She would learn to see the things which he now saw, by looking through his accustomed eyes at the sights which to him had lost their strangeness, but which could never be made common by long use! It was a sweet dream, and it made him happy, as is the manner of dreams, quite apart from any serious hope of its realization.

But the jungle is filled with demons, as the natives,

and we others who have sojourned long in its midst, know full well, and these demons are jealous spirits which love not those who intrude upon their sanctuaries. If you ask scientific men for their opinion, you will be told that microbes and insects, more especially mosquitoes—those unfortunate Eastern gnats upon whose slender backs heavier burdens are nowadays imposed than is surely fair, even in the eyes of a sorely tried and itching population—are accountable for everything; but we who are of the jungle know better. Our devils are strong and very wrathful, and they wreak their rage upon newcomers, as, in the sight of the salted, who have won immunity through years of faithful service, is only right and proper. Suddenly, these demons, whose solitude had been disturbed, who had seen the forest trees felled, the green foliage turned before its time to faded dusty yellows, who had listened wrathfully to the ringing strokes of axes, arose in their anger and fell upon Cyril Bazelgate and his little band of woodmen. Cyril called it fever, and he dosed his men with quinine, and made his own head sing and buzz with the same medicine; but work was stopped, which, after all, was the end which the forest demons had in view. Then a man died. The Bâjaus keened shrilly in token of their grief, and bad Muhammadans that they are, they held a drunken wake, the noise of which broke harshly on the stillness of the forest. The demons answered with discordant echoes that had a note of menace in them, and that night the little undertaker bird sat on the roof tree and drove coffin nails past all counting till the dawn was yellowing. Next day, five

other men were too ill to move or eat, and at the end of the week Bazelgate had helped to bury two more of them. The rickety little wooden *nêsan*, which marked the newmade graves, were not pretty to look at in the moonlight as Bazelgate stood gazing at them from the door of his hut, what time his men sat grumbling together in the darkness of their lines. The jungle was smiting him heavily, he felt, and the bitterness of disappointment was strong upon him, mingled with a strange sense of injustice.

"What can one do?" said the headman of the coolies to his fellows. "It is the jungle demon, the spectre huntsman, who hath set his spite upon us. Listen, my brothers!"

As he spoke, there came a whirring overhead outside in the darkness, the beat of numberless tiny wings, and a few faint, squeaking twitters like those made by bats. "Listen," said the headman again. "It is a flock of the *bêrek-berêk*, the fly-catchers. They are the hounds of the spectre huntsman, and they only fly by night when evil is afoot. If our eyes could have beheld them, we should have seen that they flew, not as they fly by day, but with their bellies and their feet turned heavenwards!" He stepped to the low doorway and looked out into the dim moonlight. The sound of the flying flock had passed away. He threw a couple of handfuls of uncooked rice out into the gloom. "Feed full," he cried. "Feed full, my brothers, and harm us not, in the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, and of Muhammad the Prophet of God!"

The jungle demons sent his words back in a hollow

echo, and the men in the hut shuddered. The headman came back to his place and sat down stiffly. Two or three shapeless bundles, completely swathed in old coverlets, lay huddled up on the bunks around the room. From each of them, at short regular intervals, came breathless panting grunts such as natives use when the fever holds them. The faces of the other men were pinched and thin, and pale with the unhealthy colour that comes to brown folk in time of sickness. Their eyes were unnaturally bright. The jungle demon had won his grip on one and all of them.

"To-morrow," said the headman after a long pause, "I will get me to the *Tûan* and I will tell him that we must depart. It is not good to wrestle with the spectre huntsman, and we folk have already tried a fall too many with him."

"What has angered him, think you?" asked one of the other men.

"The spectre huntsman is ever angry when folk make trouble in his country," said the headman gravely. "Thou knowest that he is doomed to hunt for ever through the forest lands, seeking for a stag that is big with young. 'Tis a hard quest, and since the beginning of time, before the days of Pětëra Gûru or of Sang Kelembai, who turned all things to stone, he has wandered hunting for the pregnant stag, but never finding that for which he seeks. Also, by reason of a curse, the back of his head is fixed fast to the nape of his neck in such fashion that he looketh ever skyward, and the *bêrek-berêk* birds, which fly feet uppermost, guide him, and men say they are his hounds, though others hold

that they are his casting net. Owing to the failure of his quest, his heart is ever a hungry heart, and since he knoweth that the coming of men into these solitudes baffles him in his hunting, he often turneth his wrath upon strangers, bringing a sickness such as that which now we see."

The men mumbled their discontent. They never dreamed of doubting the accuracy of their headman's information, and indeed the superstition of which he spoke was one well known to every man among them. "To-morrow," they said, "we will leave this place, Allah being willing. It is not good to war with evil spirits."

The inclusion of the name of the Almighty in a sentence which referred to evil demons, who should rightly hold no place in the belief of the followers of the Prophet, was characteristic of the lax Muhammadanism of the Bâjaus, but to them it was in no way incongruous.

Next day, they went in a body to Cyril Bazelgate, and the headman acted as their spokesman.

"*Tûan*," he said, "behold, the forest demons are warring with us, wherefore we would leave this place. Sûdi and Âli are dead, and Hîland died before they passed from life. Tûming and Timbang are very sick, and we, too, are afflicted with many pains so that we may not toil. This thing is no fever: it is caused by the spectre huntsman, who hath put his spite upon us. Wherefore we can no longer abide in this place, lest we die. It is not good for men to war with devils. Last night, the *bêrek-berêk* flew over the camp, and they did

not profit by our offerings. That showeth that the maws of the spectre huntsman's hounds can only be filled by the lives of men. This is an accursed thing, wherefore we will presently depart. Shall I make ready the boat?"

Cyril, who saw ruin staring him in the face if he abandoned his timber works, and who knew that he would certainly fail to procure other labourers if these men left him with such a tale upon their lips, would not hear of consenting to the proposal. His knowledge of Malay was not great, and indeed he had had some difficulty in following all that the headman said; but he made the most of what he knew now, and tried successively coaxing, persuasion, threats, and abuse. As he grew more and more heated his newly acquired speech dropped away from him, and at last he stood raving at his men in stuttering phrases which well-nigh set them laughing in his face. Finding that they could not shake his resolution, however, they retired sulkily to their hut, and the rest of the day was passed by them in growling murmurs or sullen silence. Cyril Bazelgate, in common with other persons who have not been brought much into intimate personal contact with Orientals, had heard a great deal about the fatalistic resignation of natives, and when he saw them withdraw after their talk with him, obviously discontented but not openly rebellious, he was quite satisfied that he had conquered, and that the incident was at an end. He had yet to learn that the persistence of the native differs only from that of the white man in that it is less demonstrative, less loud in its professions and its protests,

more secretive and cautious. This little piece of experience was like to cost him dear.

The slow hours of the day crept by with heavy-shod feet; the sun beat down upon the stricken camp, grilling it; the faint breezes among the *nîpah* fronds and the dense foliage whispered with a mocking suggestion of coolness which had no existence; the mid-day hush was succeeded by the twitterings and pipings of birds newly awakened, and on this broke the full-mouthed chorus of all the jungle people, which is ever raised when day gives place to darkness. Cyril lay upon his bunk thinking miserably of the blows which fate was dealing to him, and his head sang again with fever and with the doses of quinine with which he had drenched himself. At times, his mind leaped away, as from a leash, and hurried him whithersoever it would, resisting all control. He recalled all manner of trivial incidents which until then had been hidden from him in some neglected fold of his memory, incidents futile and meaningless that he had barely noticed consciously at the time of their occurrence. Twenty times he imagined himself to be far away in the sweet meadowlands of the West country, where his boyhood had been spent, and woke with a shock to a sudden and cruel realization of his surroundings, to the sight of the thatch roof overhead supported on rough rafters, to the heat and sweat, to the squalid discomfort of his life of banishment. All the little miseries which are inseparable from life in the jungle, things which he had scarcely marked while health stayed and fortified him, now combined to force themselves upon him, their horror

magnified by the nightmare of disease, distorted out of all true proportion by the exaggeration of a fevered brain. The thought of the Girl at Home had not now power to comfort him, rather the sick longing that her memory awakened put the crown upon his sufferings. The pangs of a great nostalgia racked him mercilessly.

At times, he would doze off fitfully, but evil dreams pursued him. He found himself on the bridge of a man-of-war and knew that he was running her to destruction, and yet lacked the power to speak the word which alone could avert the catastrophe; he imagined himself in the bowels of ships jammed between guns and other impossible objects, fighting desperately with bellying folds of canvas that would not let him use his limbs; hideous faces rushed screaming toward him with incredible speed out of a world of darkness, and at the moment of collision hurled him into wakefulness with the force of an impact that left him trembling from head to heel. He was alternately drenched with perspiration and parched with a fiery heat; his head throbbed and ached; his eyeballs seemed to be live coals burning their way inward to his brain; every joint and sinew and muscle in his frame held its separate pang; whenever he moved, he half expected to hear the creaking of bone against bone, a creaking that set his teeth on edge in anticipation. He hardly realized that he was in a high fever. His mind and body were too deadly sick to make the act of reasoning a possibility. He only felt that he was in hell, damned before his time, and he watched the extremity of his own sufferings impersonally, as though he were possessed of a double

identity, yet with a keen access of self-pity, and, none the less, he felt to the full every excruciation of the agonies which excited his commiseration.

He could not touch food, and he lay inert and utterly wretched all through the day, during the sad short twilight, and through the long phantom-haunted night. The cool wind at dawn brought him some measure of relief, and he dragged himself off his bunk and staggered to the doorway of his hut. He was astonished to find how weak and spent he was, how terribly the twenty-four hours of illness had milked the manhood out of him. If his men wished to leave the stricken place, he would not now resist their will. To stay longer in that camp meant death—death to him and to his natives. His men had been right: it was not good for any one to war with powers too strong for human beings. The fever demon had routed him. He had not an atom of fight left in him.

He stood supporting himself by the jamb of the door, looking out into the early morning world. Before him lay the narrow river, on the right bank of which his camp was pitched, a ribbon of discoloured water drawn ceaselessly through a wilderness of forest. The balks of timber lay in untidy piles on all sides, their rough-hewn faces reeking with the damp of the heavy dews. Rank grasses sprouted around them and thrust green fingers between balk and balk, with a suggestion of wood-lice and other unsightly insects. Great masses of gray mist hung low above forest and river, or crawled in smoky swirls upon the surface of the water. The leaves of the trees, the fronds of the palms, the ragged

edges of the house thatch all dripped persistently, as with the sound of furtive and disconsolate weeping. The whole world seemed wet and sodden; it gave off a clammy chill exhalation that set the white man shuddering; it was as the very breath of death itself.

He raised his voice and shouted the name of the headman of the coolies, and the weak, quavering notes sobbed out impotently and were lost in the vast sodden wilderness about him. He hardly knew the sound of his own voice, it was so faint, so strange. Even in his own ears it seemed thin and distant, as though it came from some other world. Again and again he raised his voice and called, but only the dulled echoes made reply. How heavily the men were sleeping! With faltering footsteps, and a heart that throbbed and jerked in anticipation of some dreaded evil, he knew not what, he half stumbled, half groped his way to the hut in which his coolies lived. He reached the doorway somehow, and stood there panting and holding on to the upright posts for support. The gray daylight, straggling out of the watery heavens, penetrated with difficulty into the gloom of the windowless hut, and Cyril, peeping into the dim interior, could not make out anything for a moment or so. Then, with a sickening shock, he realized of a sudden that the place was empty—empty alike of men and of gear. For a space it seemed to him that the hallucinations of the fever-haunted night were still upon him, that it was impossible that this unspeakable thing had happened to him. Each individual man is ever loth to believe that the worst of all conceivable misfortunes has befallen him

personally—that he, among all mankind, has been singled out for the especial spite of Fate. He can understand this happening in the case of another, but the worst ever seems to him to be too bad to be true if he is to be the victim. Cyril felt this now, felt it intensely, and in spite of the evidence of his senses, he declined to accept as a fact the situation revealed by the empty hut. His men *could* not have deserted him: it was a monstrous notion, a folly, a patent impossibility. Again he raised his voice in quavering shouts and hails, but only the forest answered from its sodden depths. He turned about and crept, bent like an old man, to the river's brink, where his only boat was wont to be moored. The mark of its prow was there deeply scored in the yielding mud beside the little landing stage. With a heart that leaped upward sickeningly, Cyril made his way painfully, and with gasping breath, to the mouth of the creek and stood looking out over the still waters of the Sandakan Bay. Below the curtain of mist he could see the gray sea heaving gently; little wavelets plashed on the shore at his feet; thousands of tiny colourless crabs ran swiftly hither and thither over the sand, disturbed by his approach; the wind caught a great round ball of spike grass and sent it rolling and dancing along the beach like a thing endowed with life; a pair of gulls circled and called softly; a flock of white rice birds flew about a forest-clad islet, turning and falling, looking, as the sunlight touched them, like a tiny isolated patch of drifting snowflakes. But all these things were hardly noticed by Cyril Bazelgate. His eyes, starting from their sockets, were fixed upon a

native boat which lumbered slowly away from him under a broad spread of limp canvas. He knew its every line, from the curve of the hull to the square patch upon the sail. It was his boat, his only means of communication with the world which lay on the other side of the bay, the only thing that could enable him to escape from the death trap in which he found himself, and it was drifting with an agonizing slowness away, away into the mist banks. Wild with a sudden fear, Cyril screamed and shouted, and his thin voice, lost in the vastness of that empty world, sounded faint and impotent as a whisper; he slipped off his white sleeping jacket and waved it wildly above his head; he danced and capered madly, his weakness and his fever forgotten in the extremity of his terror; but the boat held on its way sullenly till the downward-dropping mist swallowed it. Then, for a space, Cyril Bazelgate must have gone mad. He remembered shouting against a rasped throat till his voice forsook him; he remembered dancing and waving his jacket long after his power of lung had failed him; he remembered pouring out a stream of incoherent entreaties, mixed with awful curses and blasphemies such as his heart had never before conceived; and then a film came over his sight, the seascape reeled, thunders were in his ears, lights blazed and flashed before his eyes, a deadly faintness overpowered him, and he knew no more.

He came to himself at last to find the midday sun scorching his bare body and beating pitilessly down upon his uncovered head. He sat up, wondering where

he was and what had befallen him, but crushed with a vague sense of some overpowering calamity sitting heavily upon his soul. Then he remembered, with a shock which set him trembling, and for a moment or two he was too dazed and ill to be able even to summon the strength to draw himself out of the sun glare into the shade of the shivering casurina trees. Later, he struggled to his feet and groped his way painfully toward his hut. The emptiness and the tense silence of the place fell upon his spirit like a pall, as he entered his squalid dwelling. He had food of sorts, but he lacked the strength or the energy to prepare a meal for himself. It was all he could do to pour himself out a stiff glass of whisky, and then to stagger to his bunk, upon which he collapsed limply. The fever had returned with redoubled force; his head was dizzy, and the back of it ached agonizingly; his eyes throbbed and burned; the skin of his body was sore and blistered where the sun had smitten it; he could not find ease in any position, turn and twist as he might upon his hard mat; every nerve, every bone, every joint, every muscle, every sinew cried out in its separate pain. And again his mind wandered, torturing him with pictures of cool English fields under a summer sun, with the memory of loved faces, tender hands, soft voices of those whom he knew to be very distant, and utterly powerless to minister to him. But through all, the breathless stillness and silence of the forest, which emphasized his loneliness, made itself felt like a tangible thing, and oppressed him with an insistent irritation. He would have given

his soul for that dreadful silence to be broken even for an instant.

At times it seemed to him that he was already dead—dead and buried at the bottom of a fearful world where no man came, where no sound could make itself heard; that he was sunken a million fathoms deep in a grave of ghostly stillness; that he was beginning to decay while the power to feel was still alive in him. He dragged himself up into a sitting posture and pressed the puffy ovals of his legs with his fingers. They sank inward almost to the first joints, and when he withdrew them, four deep indentations exactly corresponding in shape to their tips remained to mark the points where they had pressed. He knew the sign well, had seen it before in many an Asiatic hospital ward. It was *beri-beri*—tropical dropsy. He had been right. He *was* beginning to decay, from the feet upward!

Yet, all the while, the desire to live was very strong within him. The memory of the Girl at Home kept that desire alive in his breast, and, as his feebleness increased, he was beset with fears lest the beasts of the forest should fall upon him, now that he was defenceless and alone, and should rob him of his last chance of escape from an awful death. Most of all, his sick fancy dwelt upon the possibility of an onslaught being made upon him by the wild swine which herded in the jungle all around his camp. He knew that they delighted in carrion, and had the courage to attack anything in which only a little life remained. He could hear them in imagination rooting and snorting around his dwelling,

could picture the brutal heads and snouts protruding through his doorway, and then . . . Argh, it was too horrible to think about!

Time had lost all meaning for him. The day slipped into night, the dawn awoke the world anew, and he hardly marked the changes, although each hour was fraught with its own peculiar torments. He tried to force himself to eat, but with little success—though each mouthful was taken for the sake of the Girl at Home—and the fever and neglect wasted him slowly, surely. But of all his sufferings the worst was the awful loneliness, and the appalling, breathless silence. He was alone in an empty world—as utterly alone as the last survivor of our kind will be when the earth has waxed too old to support our restless life—as alone as was our first parent when God saw that solitude was evil. The horror of it gripped him.

A little steam-launch puffed across the bay. In her sat the khaki-clad figure of the Church of England clergyman, and on the deck at his feet squatted a couple of wild-looking Dyaks. The latter had brought into Sandakan on the previous night a strange story of a deserted hut which they had chanced upon while hunting for gum, and a hum, as of many bees, which had sounded in their ears when they approached it. As is the case in all new countries, the officials at Sandakan were each doing the work of half-a-dozen men, and the chaplain, who in this respect was no exception to the rule, was always ready to offer to fill a gap when some unpleasant duty was on hand which no other man

had either the time or the inclination to perform. Accordingly, he had volunteered to go back with the Dyaks to the hut of which they spoke and to investigate the supposed mystery. Bazelgate's boat had not visited Sandakan for some weeks, but this had excited no surprise, as he was known to be well stocked with provisions, and mails were in those days so irregular that he would be hardly likely to send for his letters more than once in each month. All the same, the story of the deserted hut had filled the authorities in Sandakan with uneasiness, and the parson had shared their fears.

The little launch wriggled out over the smooth sea, throbbing and pulsing to the beat of her screw, and after threading her way in and out among the islands, entered the tiny creek on the banks of which Cyril Bazelgate had pitched his ill-fated camp. As she made the river's mouth, the sharp nose of the launch thrust forward against the stream, clove it into a brace of oily, brown-coloured waves, and the wash smote in a long whispering swish upon the mud banks on either hand. This was the only sound that broke upon the solemn stillness, for it was high noon, and the world of forest land was wrapped in its siesta. The jungle was hushed, and the parson found himself holding his breath as though in expectation of some awful catastrophe. Presently, the site of the camp came into view, and the parson, leaning out over the railing at the bow, shouted Bazelgate's name at the top of his voice. The sound fell upon the banks of forest and wandered off up-stream to be lost in faintly murmuring echoes. "Blow the steam whistle, *serang*," he said over his

shoulder, and the hooting scream of the little craft sounded disconsolately on the hot, still air. No answer came from the shore.

The launch ran up to the rickety landing stage, and the parson, leaping ashore, walked quickly to the door of the hut. A scuttling, grunting sound came from within, and three wild pigs tore past the horrified clergyman and scampered off into the forest. He looked through the doorway, and as he did so, a thing like a black hairy rug which was lying on the floor near the bunk rose into the air with a loud buzzing sound, and immediately dissolved into a myriad atoms, separate, bloated, and noisy. They were innumerable flies! The thing on the floor, which they had so hurriedly deserted, was an unspeakable object, offensive alike to every sense.

How the clergyman and the launch men, aided by the Dyaks, contrived to bury that thing does not matter. It took time, all the authority which the parson could exercise, and the task seemed to have robbed them all of years of life long before it was accomplished. The parson's face was gray as he turned away from the new-filled grave, after the short prayers had been uttered.

"Poor, poor fellow," he said sadly. "What an awful death, alone and untended! Well, God has him in His keeping, and his pains are at an end; but his poor mother, God help her! and, like as not"—for the parson knew the hearts of his fellows—"there was some Girl at Home! They must never know; and I cannot even send them a lock of his hair!"

THE KING OF THE SEDANGS

BORN out of due time, some centuries too late for his comfort and well-being, was Marie David de Mayrena, Comte de Ray, the man of striking personality, high courage, boundless self-confidence, and marvellous vanity, whom we of south-eastern Asia will ever remember, 'twixt sighs and laughter, by the title in which he found so much compensation for adversity, of Marie the First, King of the Sedangs. We never knew him in the heyday of his glory and success; our acquaintance began when his trouble had come upon him, when France had set her spite against him, and later yet, when the little fairy-land of Tioman, the island in the China Sea off the coast of Pahang, had become at once his prison, and a peaceful refuge for his restless, wandering spirit. We were all of us younger in those days, and his was a personality to impress wiser men than we; so we fell somewhat under the spell of the glamour that he ever cast upon those about him, called him "King" to his face with semi-humorous respect, and found some of the romance that was dear to us in this outcast with the strange history.

He was of heroic build, very long in the leg and broad in the shoulder, with black hair and moustaches and a bushy grizzled beard. There was power in every line

of that face, in the hard, determined, cruel mouth, the dark and heavy eyebrows which nearly joined each other across the bridge of the nose, in the broad, smooth forehead, in the eyes themselves, keen, fierce, piercing, and cynical. He was an excellent shot, of great bodily strength, a man of violent passions and uncontrollable temper; and as the leader of dissolute guerillas, he had displayed a Gallic courage, dashing and reckless, and had writ his name large all over the *Hinterland* of Annam, in days when none save the silent Roman Catholic missionaries had had the hardihood to penetrate into those savage countries. He had impressed the wild people of a little cluster of native states in that locality so deeply with his valour, and with that magnetic power of personality, which among a barbarous race counts for more than all the virtues, that of their own free will they had elected this outcast European to be their king, and had bound themselves to him by treaties of allegiance, paying tribute of elephants and much precious gear. The French missionaries, who had more experience of native kings and of their winning ways than any men could desire, were delighted at the prospect of the turbulent tribesmen in their neighbourhood learning to live in peace and good-fellowship under the rule of a man they feared, one who had succeeded in inspiring in their savage hearts a passionate devotion. Therefore, the good priests, who, I doubt not, were dazzled somewhat by the glamour that blinded us all in after days, lent their aid and influence to the king, and he in return solemnly declared the Catholic religion to be that of the State of

the Sedangs. He was too wise, however, to attempt to interfere with the beliefs of his newly acquired subjects, and since the majority of them were Muhammadans, he too publicly declared himself a True Believer, and a follower of Allah and his Prophet.

Like the true Frenchman that he was, the King of the Sedangs had not been seated firmly on the throne for many days before he set to work to design the insignia of his new-found royalty. The national flag of the Sedangs was officially declared to be "on a blue ground a white cross with a red star in the centre"; pinchbeck jewellery, the Order of Marie the First, was fashioned by the goldsmiths of Hong-Kong, and the priests and chiefs were duly decorated; the King, magnificently attired, appeared in public seated upon a gorgeously caparisoned elephant, and the people of Sedang bowed down before him and did him reverence. He was King indeed, and, for a while, the display of his barbaric court satisfied the cravings of his soul, and the French Government on the coast winked at his kingship with no unfriendly eye.

But Marie David de Mayrena, Comte de Ray and King of the Sedangs, was a dreamer of dreams. He had built his Castle in Spain during many years of toil, danger, and privation, had built it, as so many do, when it seemed well-nigh impossible that he should ever come to inhabit it; and as is the manner of dreamers, having won his desire, he found his ambition still unsatisfied, and springing up in his heart new longings more hungry and importunate than the old. He dreamed of a time when he should make the land of the Sedangs a kingdom

taking equal rank with other independent Asiatic principalities, when he should have fully developed the resources of the country, and have founded a dynasty in the East that should be perpetuated in the person of the son that was not yet born to him. For the accomplishment of these schemes, it was necessary that the King of the Sedangs should step down from his throne and condescend to rub shoulders with the commonplace men who inhabit European capitals; that he should quit the atmosphere of his Thirteenth Century kingdom and learn, for a space, to breathe the fevered air of the white man's Nineteenth Century; that he should abandon pomp, and state, and ease, and the land which his own strong hand had won for him, and go forth into unromantic countries, like the simple adventurer that he was, to conquer new worlds. So, in the spring of 1889, his Majesty Marie the First arrived in Hong-Kong and called upon all the most influential people in the place, leaving behind him the impression of a powerful personality and a large visiting card bearing the legend *S. M. le Roi des Sedangs*. He conferred the Order of Marie the First upon a number of unwilling individuals, from the sorely embarrassed Governor, who had not the remotest idea what to do with this undesirable decoration, to the sporting merchants, who could not induce their fellows to accept it in lieu of a two-dollar ante. Having thus made his presence known in a manner characteristic and ostentatious, with that inevitable touch of the ridiculous that ever marred his posing, the King of the Sedangs began to develop his plans.

He had thought that it would be easy to raise the funds which were needed for his projects locally, but here an unexpected obstacle to his success presented itself. The French authorities, who had informally recognized him as King of the Sedangs, so long as he was in his own state, when they were powerless to dislodge him, now suddenly and publicly repudiated him and his claims, reducing the erstwhile king, by a stroke of the pen, to the position of an outcast in a foreign land, desperate and almost penniless. Then Marie the First, a prophet unhonoured in his own country, took a momentous step. Solemnly and publicly, in the name of himself and his people, with that complete lack of all sense of proportion and of the ridiculous that made him so delightful, he repudiated France! His action made us smile, his manner was so magnificent, so tremendously in earnest, but the very seriousness with which he regarded himself and his position as an outraged monarch had more than a little of pathos underlying the humour. Having, so to speak, declared war against the land of his birth, the King lost no time in sending a telegram to Berlin, offering to the then newly crowned Emperor William the allegiance of himself and all the people of Sedang in return for German protection. The Foreign Office of the Fatherland would probably have been sorely put to it to locate the whereabouts of the state which they were thus suddenly asked to take under their protection, had the King's telegram ever reached its destination. As a matter of fact, however, the missive never got any further on its journey than Saigon, for King Marie had been guilty of the folly of

sending his offer in open German, undisguised by cipher, apparently forgetful of the fact that it must be transmitted from Hong-Kong through the telegraph stations of French Indo-China.

When it was discovered that the perfidious Marie had attempted to hand over the land which he had won to the hated Germans, the most maddening excitement prevailed in Saigon, where seventy-five per cent. of the European population are officials, civil or military, and at least twenty per cent. more French monopolists, daughters of the horse leech, crying, "Give, give!" In similar circumstances, the authorities of an English colony would have smiled to themselves, and would then have taken such action as they deemed necessary, with a perfectly unbroken calm and a complete absence of noise. At Saigon, however, gentlemen in uniforms of many shades of red and blue rushed hither and thither screaming execrations, raged at the club, shook their fists at imaginary foes, fumed, stamped, cursed, gesticulated. Other gentlemen, suffocating in tightly buttoned frock coats decorated with little tags of red ribbon, sat in their offices or took their *petits verres* in the *cafés* on the boulevards, working themselves into an indescribable state of heat and excitement, as they discussed again and again the action of the King of the Sedangs. The inspired newspapers (and, speaking broadly, all newspapers in French Indo-China are either inspired or are speedily suppressed) raved and howled in chorus. Whereupon, finding that his countrymen in the East were prepared to take him so seriously, Marie the First, King of the Sedangs, who never stood

in any great need of encouragement to over-value his own importance, began to take himself with a profoundness of gravity that was truly portentous.

He spoke of himself as a martyr to the cause of liberty, as a lawful sovereign, at peace with England, basely kept from his own by the tyranny of France. He assumed airs which would hardly have sat becomingly on the last of [the Stuarts; and he spoke darkly of a certain order for his summary execution which, so he averred, had been telegraphed from Paris, and was then lying hidden away in the official pigeonholes at Saigon, ready to be produced at the proper moment. The order, as he quoted it from a copy which he professed to have obtained by means of great cunning and strategy, was very simple and to the point. It contained only two words—*Fusillez le!* “For thus,” he was wont to exclaim, “does France dare to treat Crowned Heads with whom she has cause for quarrel! What would you have? ’Tis in the blood, ever since that fatal day on which perished the King, Louis the Sixteenth!”

But it was impossible to laugh at the King and at his pretensions when in his presence; he was so solemn, so brave, so injured, so impressive; and though men grinned behind his back, they sent the hat round for him in Hong-Kong, and had no difficulty in filling it to the brim with money to defray the cost of the King’s journey back to Europe. The King received the subscription with that grand air of his, which left the impression upon his friends that he was thereby conferring rather than receiving a favour. He spoke of the special privileges which he would grant to the merchants

of Hong-Kong in recognition of their loyalty, when in the fulness of time he should return to his kingdom; and he stepped on board the German mail steamer, amid the half-ironical cheers of the spectators, bowing like a monarch in acknowledgment of the plaudits of his subjects.

The Hong-Kong merchants, who had paid his passage and had supplied his Majesty with a little ready money, had been actuated partly by a desire to remunerate one from whom they had derived so much entertainment, and partly by a truly British wish to see fair play, or, as they phrased it, "to give the beggar a chance." Here was an unfortunate white man, who had undoubtedly done doughty deeds in the past, battling bravely and entirely alone against one of the greatest Powers of modern times. In spite of the ridiculous posing, the egotism, the pomposity, and the pinchbeck jewellery and decorations, the figure of this lonely man engaged in a conflict so unequal, had in it something grand, romantic, pathetic, which fired their imaginations; and if a little ready money would help to improve his chances and to arm him for the fray, they were not the men to withhold it and to pass by on the other side, leaving him crippled and unfriended.

When the King had started upon his homeward passage, the Hong-Kong police went from house to house collecting the pinchbeck orders which his Majesty had scattered broadcast among his acquaintances; and these pieces of jewellery they subsequently sold by auction for the benefit of the goldsmith who had fashioned

them, for the King, like many of his prototypes in history, had proved himself to be a bad paymaster.

After the German mail bore him out of our lives, no more was heard concerning Marie David de Mayrena, King of the Sedangs, for many months. Then little puffs of news, vague and intangible as smoke, began to be blown eastward. He was in prison at Ostend—in prison for debt. *Les braves Belges* had had no more respect for his kinthood than to serve him as they served other ill-advised people who could not pay their way. We mourned over him a little, for we had hoped for better things, but we told one another that this was the logical conclusion to his checkered career. Then, of a sudden, fresh rumours came to us. His Majesty Marie the First, King of the Sedangs, had paid a visit to the British House of Commons, where he had been received with every mark of respect and interest by some of our leading politicians; he had bragged to them, with the same unfettered freedom that he had used in his intercourse with us; he had impressed them—men used to bluff and swagger and the ways of political hucksters—just as he had impressed our simple selves; and even the half-humorous contempt which had underlain all our feelings toward him had been lacking in the honourable members who were present at his entertainment. We began to wonder whether after all we had been fools, misreading this man whom our betters delighted to honour; and many among us who had hitherto been stolidly silent, arose noisy and triumphant, crying, “I told you so!” It was with absolute relief that we learned a week or two later that

the lady whom the King had introduced to our fascinated legislators as her Majesty the Queen of the Sedangs was a damsel not too honourably distinguished upon the boards of a Parisian *café-chantant*. It was then our turn to say, "We told you so!" to our abashed comrades, and we said it many times.

After this daring escapade, which had been executed, we felt, altogether in the King's best manner, the curtain of silence dropped once more, hiding his Majesty from the eyes of his Eastern friends, who had learned to love his meteor-like appearances upon the stage where he strutted so vaingloriously.

Then, with no word of warning, the King suddenly electrified us all by landing in Singapore with a dozen Belgian gentlemen at his heels. *Le Congo* was at that time firing the slow blood of the Flemings to something not wholly unlike enthusiasm, and any scheme which had for its object colonial expansion and the opening of a new market to Belgian goods was sure of a hearty reception from the bourgeoisie of Brussels and other large towns. The King, who had ever had a keen eye for an opportunity, had realized this, and had not been slow to profit by it. Secretly, a syndicate had been formed having for its object the development of the land of the Sedangs by means of Belgian capital, and the King had been placed in possession of a large sum of ready money. From the families of the Belgian *bourgeois*, who had thus opportunely come to his aid, his Majesty had selected a number of gentlemen to assist him in the administration of his country and the development of its wealth. He had made his

choice cunningly from a class of men who thought much of titles and decorations, and who were withal sufficiently simple to walk open-eyed into such snares as the King might find occasion to set for their unwary feet. Thus they had all signed agreements with him by which he bound himself to grant to each a high-sounding official title, a position to match in the newly constituted kingdom of the Sedangs, and a princely salary. But tucked snugly away in the body of the document was a provision, to which none of the contracting parties seemed to have attached any importance, to the effect that no payments on account of salary were to be made until the land of the Sedangs had been reached in safety, and further, that refunds to defray cost of passage to the East were to be similarly postponed. The titles, however, might be borne from the moment that the bearer quitted his native country.

We were all delighted when we learned that the King and his suite had arrived in our midst. Life in the more remote corners of the earth has a trick of becoming achingly monotonous; and the figure of the King, strutting into our dull days with his train of Belgian cits at his heels, promised to afford us as much entertainment as we had any right to expect.

Our French neighbours, the officials and monopolists aforesaid, did not share our view of the situation. Now, as ever, they regarded the King and his actions with a portentous gravity. They tumbled over one another in excited groups, striving to get at the blocked telegraph wires: they sent messages to Paris which might not unfittingly have heralded the return of a

Napoleon; and the French Foreign Office, replying with voluminous instructions, turned about to hammer insistently at the doors of Downing Street. The ponderous and slow-moving British Government was hustled into something like nimbleness by the infectious agitation of its neighbour; and on a certain day, Marie David de Mayrena received an intimation from a British official that he would not be permitted to make Singapore or any other of her Majesty's dominions the base of his operations. He replied in a letter signed *Marie, Roi*, that he sought only to return to the Sedangs, that the throne of that country was his by right, and that he *forbade* any one to interfere with him. He was thereupon informed that, if he attempted to take any action hostile to the French Government while he remained on British soil, his arrest would follow with lightning-like rapidity.

Then, probably for the first time in all his days, Marie, the King, lost his nerve. He recalled to mind the death warrant, which he believed to be lying concealed in the bureaux of Saigon; he remembered the well-known perfidy of Albion; he saw himself a political personage of the first importance, menacing France with his colossal hand while she crouched for the spring; he thought of all these things, and the more he meditated upon them, the more certain did it appear to him that France would be prepared to pay any price for his surrender, and that England, perfidious and commercial as of old, would sell him to his enemies without scruple. The only reason why his arrest was delayed, he told himself, lay in the fact that the government of

the nation of shopkeepers was bent upon driving a bargain, knowing full well the value of the prize they held in their hands; and if France were in the end forced to pay a heavy price for him, she would be all the more sure to get her money's worth when he was delivered safely into her grip. The whole of the King's speculations were based upon an extravagant estimate of his own importance; and this, in its turn, was due to an ingrained weakness in his character, against which the arguments of his friends broke impotently like waves on a rocky shore. Of a sudden, without even warning his Belgian followers, and taking no one with him save only his Prime Minister, Marie the First, King of the Sedangs, fled from Singapore to the little Island of Tioman in the China Sea, where, since Pahang, to which it belongs, is a British protectorate and not a colony, he deemed himself to be secure.

Were a man in search of a lovely and secluded paradise in which to lay him down to rest his tired bones, he could find few spots upon this earth more suited to his purpose than the island upon which the King now took up his abode. From the blue ripples of the China Sea, the land runs upward, in undulating slopes, till the summit of the mountain, which is the heart of the island, is reached. The heavy Malayan jungle, a closely woven warp and woof of greenery, covers all the land and fringes the sides of the twin peaks which crown the whole. The ugly difference between the Occidental and the Oriental points of view is exemplified strikingly in the names which these peaks bear in the jargon of the British seamen and in the language of the

Malayan fisher-folk respectively. The white man, looking at the island as his steamer ploughs and lurches past it, can find no more appropriate name to give to the lovely mountain than that of the Ass's Ears; the fisherman, gazing up at it out of eyes grown wise from looking nature in the face, and filled with a childlike faith in the marvels of old-world legends, names it the Dragon's Horns.

On the eastern side of the island, at a spot where the ruddy dawn paints a lane of light along a vast stretch of uninterrupted sea, there lies a tiny bay, tucked snugly away between two rocky headlands. The sand is almost white, dazzling to look upon, and strewn with marvellous shells. Fifty yards inland the fronds of the coconut palms nod gracefully over the thatched roofs of a village; and all about the beach fishing boats, nets, and tackle lie in the sunlight, bearing testimony to the manner in which the Tioman folk earn their scanty livelihood. No stranger visits this bay from year's end to year's end; and the villagers are born, and love, and marry, and are laid to rest under the *sudu* plants without having experience of any fuller, wider life than that which their island home affords.

This was the place in which the hunted King sought refuge, building for himself a hut at a little distance from the Malay habitations, and paying royally for all he got with coins of gold such as the natives had never seen before.

The headman of Tioman was much exercised in mind at the arrival of this white man, who in broken Malay told all who came to see him that he was a king in his

own country, and that a tyrannical European government was keeping him out of his rights. The headman made haste to Pekan, the capital of Pahang, and laid his trouble and his perplexity before his own Sultan.

“Behold, O King,” he said, “this man who hath come to dwell among us is passing strange. He hath the appearance of a white man; but his hair is not white [*viz.*, “fair”], as is the manner of the white men’s hair, but black like unto our own, and his eyes also are black. He is a *wrong* sort of white man, having much that is black about him. Moreover, he is not Inggris [English], and yet, when thy servant did ask him whether therefore he were a son of a Pranchis [French] behold his eyes waxed red, and he spat upon the ground, making answer, with curses very pungent and terrifying, that the sons of the Pranchis were his enemies. And in like manner he denieth that he is the son of a Blanda [Hollander, Dutchman]. Verily, thy servant opines that he is a very *wrong* kind of white man, having much that is black about him, lacking birthplace and countrymen, and, moreover, he is of the faith, a Muhammadan, and no Infidel as are other white folk.”

The Sultan referred the matter to his Resident, the problem being one which he found himself unable to solve; and the Resident sent instructions to a young district officer, who dwelt on the coast some hundred miles distant from Pekan and from other Europeans, bidding him visit Tioman, see the King, and report the result.

So Fortescue (as I will call the district officer) got into the crank little sailing boat in which he was accustomed

to risk his life twenty times a month on the restless waters of the China Sea, and sailed across to Tioman. He arrived there when the sun was sinking behind the Dragon's Horns, and went ashore alone to talk with the King. As he approached the little house, which the King dignified with the name of *La Maison de Roi*, Fortescue perceived that the place was stoutly barricaded, and that two or three shining gun barrels protruded their snouts from loopholes cut in the shutters, and were trained carefully on him. Being a young Englishman of the right sort, Fortescue walked calmly up to the house, for nerves he had none, and rapped upon the closed shutters with his walking stick. "*Monseigneur le Roi*," he called out gaily, "have the goodness to open the door."

The hirsute visage of the King showed itself for a moment at a crack in the wooden shutters and grinned with many teeth at the young Englishman. "You are a brave man, friend," he said in French. "You are brave, and courage we admire, we love. Figure to yourself, we expect an army, and see 'tis only a child that comes to us. Enter, enter!"

So Fortescue was made welcome, and he and the King and the King's Prime Minister, Monsieur B., feasted on the simple fare of the island, that had doubtless been purchased with the ten-franc pieces (supplied by the Belgian cits for quite other purposes) which the King was engaged in scattering broadcast among the astonished fisher folk of Tioman.

After dinner, Fortescue had much business talk with the King, and gave him to understand very explicitly

that the Government of Pahang would not suffer his Majesty to make Tioman a base of operations against the French, and the King gave his word—*parole d'honneur d'un roi*—not to abuse the hospitality of the land that had given him refuge by going counter to the wishes of his hosts in this respect.

He took an immense liking to the handsome young Englishman, and the latter was greatly impressed by the extraordinary personality of the King. Therefore, the twain made fast friends, and on that night, and on many a subsequent occasion, they sat talking together far into the small hours, while the Prime Minister snored in peace upon his mat in the adjoining room. The King's past held many memories worth recounting, and he had a dramatist's eye for an artistic effect. When he dwelt upon the days in which he was struggling to obtain the mastery over the wild tribes of the Sedangs, he had many hairbreadth escapes to narrate. "Once, too, I had to face, not savages, but my own countrymen. There is a law prohibiting all men from bringing munitions of war into the *Hinterland* of Annam. That law, I defied it! I spat upon it! Not once but many times did I bring gunpowder in plenty, for I needed it in my strife with my enemies. The Administration tried to prevent me. I mocked myself of the Administration. I brought gunpowder, and more gunpowder, and again gunpowder. At last, the Administration gets word that on a certain day I go inland and that much gunpowder is in my possession. They pursue. I fly, stomach on the ground, for I care much for the gunpowder; but I weep, for it is bitter to me to

avoid my enemies. They pursue, stomach likewise on the ground. My *cochons d'indigènes* who port my gunpowder are hit with fear. They see the Administration which arrives. They disembarass themselves of their loads. They fly. Figure to yourself! I am alone, I enrage myself. I light fire, I seize a torch, I make explode the gunpowder; then I, too, fly, and I save myself, and again I mock myself of the Administration! But at what cost, my friend! See, then!"

He bared his right arm and slipped his loose coat from his shoulder. All up his arm and far into the fell of his chest there spread a horrible bluish scar, telling unmistakably of the awful injury that this determined man had deliberately inflicted upon himself rather than suffer his beloved gunpowder to fall into the hands of the Administration that he so passionately hated.

Shortly after the King had taken up his residence on Tioman, a small, rotund, very hot, and exceedingly angry gentleman, in a faded frock coat, came to Pekan, and sought an interview with the Resident. It appeared that he was no less a person than the Minister of Public Justice in the kingdom of the Sedangs, and he visited Pekan as the emissary and spokesman of the other Belgian officials whom the King had left in Singapore, with only a very few half-franc pieces between the lot of them. He came, as befitted his high office, to seek for justice—justice against the King of the Sedangs. He had a pitiful tale to tell, for when they found themselves penniless in a foreign land, the Belgian gentlemen had addressed a memorial to the

King and to his Prime Minister at Tioman, pointing out that their loyalty to the former had placed them in a position of extreme embarrassment, that they had hitherto obtained little but ridicule from those to whom they had applied for help, and that, in view of the fact that the King was the cause of all their woe, it was only right that he should furnish them with the means wherewith to defray the cost of their passages back to Belgium. The King, who, with all his faults, was not lacking in a sense of humour where other folk were concerned, had replied to this petition through Monsieur B., his Prime Minister, in a letter decked with a royal coat of arms and bearing the address of *La Maison du Roi, Tioman*. This letter stated, in courtly and official phraseology, that it was with infinite regret that his Majesty learned that his trusted followers had, through the tyranny of France and the treachery of Great Britain, suffered any inconvenience or annoyance. He had noted their request for funds, and was desolated to have to inform them that, in view of the present financial position of the treasury of the kingdom of the Sedangs, he found himself wholly unable to comply with a request so reasonable; but, having regard to their well-known loyalty to his person, and the value of the services which they had performed for the State of Sedang, he had much pleasure in acquainting them with his resolution to raise each one of them one grade in the service of which he was himself the Head. Thus the General would become a Field Marshal, the Minister of Public Justice a Lord High Chancellor,

and so on. I think that I can see the King and his Minister chuckling heartily as they concocted this most delightful of all state papers.

To the little Belgian who repeated the gist of this document to the almost convulsed Resident, however, the humour of the affair, as was perhaps natural, appealed not at all. Indeed, the memory of this reply from the King caused the excellent Minister of Public Justice to writhe with rage and impotence, while, in his fury, he executed a sort of frenzied war dance on the veranda of the Residency. But the document of agreement, under which the Belgian gentlemen bound themselves to forego all claims for pay until such time as they had arrived in safety in the land of the Sedangs, made it impossible for them to establish any case against the King's Most Excellent Majesty, and the Minister of Public Justice, still dancing with rage, and perspiring as he danced, returned sadly to Singapore, whence he and his fellows were presently shipped back to Belgium before the mast, sadder but wiser men.

Some months slipped by after this incident, and the King continued to dwell in peace on the Island of Tio-man; but his mind, restless and eager as of old, was forever devising plans whose object was to effect his return to the land of the Sedangs. He had now grown strangely suspicious, and in every ship's captain who offered to carry him up the coast and put him ashore at some point whence he might make his way disguised into his own territories, the King saw an emissary of the French or the British Government. He had with him the costume of a Roman Catholic missionary, and

when he assumed it, he was altogether indistinguishable from one of those brave and bearded priests. That a member of the great *Société des Missions Etrangères* should be found wandering alone through a strange land could not possibly excite suspicion, since no tribes are too wild, no country too difficult, no places too unsavoury for these self-sacrificing clergy. Had the King been able to overcome his fears of treachery, and had he accepted one of the many offers made to him by the masters of the coasting steamers, there can be little doubt that the Sedangs would shortly have been gladdened by the presence of their king once more in their midst.

But, for any such scheme, money was necessary, and all the King's funds were lying at a bank in Singapore. He dared not visit that place in person, and at last, after much communing with himself and with Auguste, his half-bred, mangy, flesh-coloured French poodle, who was more dear to the King than any other being on earth, he decided to send Monsieur B. to Singapore with full powers to withdraw the whole of his balance at the bank. Monsieur B. set off accordingly, promising a speedy return, and the King, with Auguste for company, strode up and down the sandy beach at Tioman, now sunken in deep thought, now haranguing the waves with shouts and gesticulations, now talking confidentially to Auguste, planning, plotting, dreaming dreams, fighting imaginary enemies, and waiting anxiously for the return of his messenger. But, alas, Monsieur B. never returned to Tioman. The money was drawn out of the bank, as had been arranged, but Monsieur B. disap-

peared, and the money with him. Perhaps the dead monotony of life at Tioman had proved too much for his nerves; perhaps the insufferable airs which the King often assumed toward him had turned his love and loyalty to hatred; or, perhaps, the tinkling tune of merry Paris, far away across the sea—merry indeed for one with much good money in his pockets—proved too alluring for Monsieur B.'s powers of resistance and self-denial. Also, he may have told himself that the money was as much his own as it was the King's, or, at any rate, that he had as good a right to it as had any one—save only the Belgian folk who, simple souls, had supplied it in the beginning.

The news of what had occurred was brought to the King by three Frenchmen who lolled up the coast in a native fishing boat, which they had fitted up as a sort of yacht for the purpose of a summer cruise. And thus the King learned that his last chance had failed him. He was at the end of his tether; his stock of ready money was running low, and when that was exhausted, he would have no means of obtaining food or raiment. He was friendless and alone on a little island in the China Sea, and he dared not make a dash for Singapore, lest that order for his execution in which he so firmly believed, should at last be used against him. On the night upon which the King received this news, he left his guests sleeping in the bungalow beneath the coconut fronds, and accompanied by Auguste, roamed up and down the beach until the sky was reddening for the dawn. Who shall say what melancholy musings were his during that lonely vigil, what long-past dreams rose

up to mock him, what pain, and anger, and bitterness, and grief came that night to rend his heartstrings?

But daylight found him calm, courteous to his visitors, gay in his speech, brave and determined as of old. Later, the King and his three friends sailed across to Rompin on the mainland, where Fortescue had his home, and the party quartered itself on the young Englishman, who so rarely saw a white face that any visitors were welcome.

On the following morning, the King drew up his will, and executed it formally in the presence of Fortescue, who was a magistrate. Then he called Auguste, and the two went out into the blazing sunshine for a stroll. Presently, the King came running back in a state of great excitement, crying to Fortescue that he had been bitten by a snake. There was a small puncture in his leg, such as might have been made by a hypodermic syringe. Everything that was possible in that remote place was done to save him, but, though no convulsions set in such as are the usual accompaniment of death by snake-bite, in an hour and a half the King of the Sedangs had "passed to where beyond these voices there is peace."

He left the land which his strong right hand had won, as a legacy to the Emperor William, but no claim has, I believe, ever been put forward from Berlin with a view to giving effect to this bequest. The Muhammadan priests and elders came at Fortescue's summons, for such was the King's dying request, and his body was prepared for burial after the manner of the followers of the Prophet. And so the frail casing of flesh and bone

which had held that restless soul was laid to sleep beneath the *sudu* plants and the spear grass in the little quiet graveyard of an obscure Malayan village; and no headstone or inscription serves to mark the last resting place of the man whose only cause of failure lay in the fact that he was born into the world in an age which holds that knights-errant and dauntless adventurers are absurd anachronisms undeserving of the sympathy of respectable people.

But if you chance to visit Tioman (it lies some eight thousand weary miles away from Hyde Park Corner), the natives of the place will point out to you a number of strange-looking quadrupeds, half pariah, half poodle, and with pride will inform you that these are *anjing pranchis* (French dogs); and these uncouth descendants of the well-beloved and redoubtable Auguste are the only traces left upon this little fairy island marking it as the erstwhile refuge of Marie David de Mayrena, Comte de Ray, and King of the Sedangs.

FROM BEYOND THE BOURNE

ONE afternoon, many years ago, when I was just beginning to learn my trade, beginning the long lesson that is never ended, Mat Rauf attached himself to my party, and travelled some thirty miles down river in my boat. I had been engaged during the last day or two in wringing the thumbed coppers which represented the annual quit-rent payable for their ancestral holdings out of the haggling villagers of Kota Tempan; and when the sun was dipping behind the banks of forest I tied up for the night at a place called Pûlau Kěmbîri.

As we lolled down-stream that sunny day, and during the still hours which followed the evening meal of rice, Mat Rauf talked almost incessantly, pouring into my ears the tale of his necessities and his troubles, the manifold ill chances which had beset his past, and the little groping ambitions which gilded the future for him in spite of all that experience had taught; for with a certain class of Malay, hope, unreasoning and unreasonable, never dies. In all this recital, however, he omitted to make any mention of the love affair which in the end wrought his undoing; and though even then I was accustomed to the veil which ever hangs between most white folk and a native's confidence, and knew more than enough concerning the sorry things it ofttimes hides, it

was with a shock that I learned some ten days later that my friend had driven his kris through the body of one of his neighbours.

It was the old sordid story. The dead man had been called away to Kuâla Kangsar, forty miles down river, upon business of some sort, and had returned to his home sooner than had been anticipated. He came by water, of course, for, in the broad Pêrak valley, no man foots it when there is a boat to hand; and when he had made the rattan painter fast to the bathing hut, he picked his way through the darkness along the narrow footpath which ran in and out among the rank growths of his compound. Perhaps, as he went, wearied by the days spent in toiling up river against the force of the current, the thought of the welcome that was awaiting him in the cosy little hut among the palm trees, and of the young wife who would minister to his comfort, were things very precious to him; perhaps he was filled with a gentle anxiety lest aught of ill should have befallen her during his absence; perhaps the anticipation of the pleasure she would show at the trifling gift which he had brought her from the town thrilled him with a simple excitement. In a few moments, he had climbed the ladder into the dark hut, had lifted the curtains to look upon the face of his sleeping wife, and then there had arisen clamour of excited voices, and pattering of bare feet, the swish of steel blades drawn swiftly from wooden scabbards, and in his own heart a bedlam of sudden torturing emotions. Malays, who hold strongly to the belief that preservation is the first law of nature, have no prejudice in favour of the chivalrous practice of

firing in the air when the man who has wrought the injury faces him whom he has wronged, and Mat Rauf was the first to draw. There was a noise of screaming from the women in the hut, the bamboo laths which formed the flooring groaned and creaked as the men leaped this way and that, dim figures hardly distinguishable in the gloom; then a sharp sudden cry, and the sound of a heavy fall, followed by gasps which seemed to chase one another panting through the stillness. Doubtless, the owner of the hut had been dazed by the awful crumbling of his world about his ears, and blinded by the might of his passion; for Mat Rauf's knife had got home the first, and presently the murderer floundered down the door ladder and leaped forth into the night, leaving a sinful woman shrieking and wailing above the rent body of the man whom her wickedness had robbed of honour and of life.

And thereupon the darkness and baffling dusk of the forest swallowed up Mat Rauf—the man who had mourned over petty troubles, dreamed trivial dreams, and then had stepped aside, as it were, casually, to perpetrate a great crime—and for many days the “eye folk of the government,” as the Malays with singular inappropriateness name our indolent policemen, sought him in vain.

That ends my personal contribution to this narrative; for the matter now came into the hands of Jack Norris, who was my senior, and it was through him, and through the gossip of scared natives, that what happened during the next few months reached me.

I was “lying off” in a long chair one sultry evening

under the penthouse, which served as a veranda to the tiny bungalow in which I then lived, when Jack walked in out of the darkness and called loudly for food. He was dressed in Cananore cloth from head to heel, cloth which had once been green, but had now faded into all sorts of rusty reds and yellows; he chucked his sun hat into a corner, took off his coat, and threw himself upon the untempting mass of lukewarm fowl which the servant brought him, as eagerly as though he had not eaten for a week. Then, through his mouthfuls and his gulps of whisky and soda, he began to talk.

"I'm like the parrot without the tail feathers," he said; "I've been having a 'devil of a time!' . . . This is uncommon sound whisky or I'm uncommonly thirsty. . . . I never saw a set of people in a more frank and shameless funk in all my life; I tell you, it's awful. Up there"—he pointed in the direction whence the river flowed with his outstretched chin; it is a native fashion, and we who lived so much among the people in those old days were constantly picking up some Malayan trick from our comrades unconsciously—"up there the land is blind with fear—fear, stark naked and unashamed. I feel as though I had come out of the tangible shadow cast over the district by Terror itself; I tell you you can feel it with all your senses, see it, hear it, taste it, smell it, touch it! It is like the pulsing of innumerable quaking hearts in your ears; it clings about you like a dense atmosphere pervading everything; it is written plain in every sight you see, from the quick glances the girls throw over their shoulders

as they steal down to the river's brink for water, to the doors barred heavily on the inside, behind which the cowering folk sit stifling during the burning daytime! It is a wonderful experience, this glimpse which I have had of a whole countryside wild with panic."

"But what's it all about?" said I.

"Mat Rauf," grunted Norris through a fragment of bread and cheese.

"But surely a single desperado cannot upset all these good people as much as all that," I objected.

"A man in the bush, unlike the bird, is worth any number in the hand or the open," said Norris sententiously. "It seems like rubbish to you, no doubt; but you haven't been there, as I have, or you would be able to understand the thing better. Do you remember the Irishman who said that he thought it would be better to be a coward for five minutes than to be dead for all the rest of his life? Well, that is more or less the point of view of all these people up river. It is the same story everywhere: barred doors, and a scuttle into cover if any one chances to be outside when the sound of a footfall is heard, and blanched brown faces with fearful eyes squinting at you through the mat walls. 'What is the matter?' 'Mat Rauf!' 'Why are you playing the fool like this?' 'Mat Rauf!' 'Where is Mat Rauf?' 'God alone knoweth, but we are afraid.' They are quite frank and simple about it; no one pretends to be any braver than his fellows, and each one's sole care is to prevent himself and his own belongings from falling into the hands of the outlaw. They say

that he is a handy man with his knife, that the blow that killed poor Che' Bûyong was shrewdly given, and that he is more than a match for any one of them."

"But haven't they any notion of combining together against him?"

"Not an atom, and I can't drum it into them, either. They say"—and Norris lapsed into the vernacular—"that Mat Rauf is as one already dead, in that his life stands forfeit to the government, and that it is not good for live men to fight with those who are no longer quick; by which they mean that Mat Rauf is desperate, will sell his life as dearly as he knows how, and that none of them relish the idea of exposing themselves to the risk of being used by him in part payment. But there is something else behind it besides. Mat Rauf is related to Saiyid Musa of Chigar Gâlah and Saiyid Mansur of Pûlau Keëmbîri, and unless I am very much mistaken, both those worthies have taken him under their protection. Now, do you see how that works? I am nearly certain that more than half the people whom I questioned from behind their barred doors knew exactly where Mat Rauf was to be found, but they would all have died rather than speak. Even if they got a fair and square chance of killing him on the quiet, I doubt whether they would take it. He is of the blood of the chiefs, and the man who gave us the straight tip would have both the Saiyids on his back in no time; and that, from the point of view of the ordinary defenceless villager, isn't good enough."

"But the position is impossible," I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me that these people, whom you

describe as half mad with fear, know perfectly well that you are searching for Mat Rauf, could help you to lay your hands on him to-morrow if they would, and yet decline to take this obvious precautionary measure for the safety of themselves and their families out of deference to a brace of chiefs whose claws have been cut ages ago?"

The East was new to me in those days, and I was as yet merely fumbling with the ins and outs of the Malayan mind and character as a child fumbles with a toy whose use it does not know; therefore, when I found people thinking from right to left, the obscurity of their motives, the intricacy and contrariness of their mental gropings, shocked my European reason and seemed to violate probability. Norris, who was better accustomed to the ways of our people, laughed at me as he lighted a cigarette.

"I mean to tell you just that," he said. "As for claw-cutting, we have taken away a great deal of their power from the chiefs, but we have not dethroned them in the eyes of their people—in fact, we have done all we could to bolster them up, so as to run the work by the help of their influence. Therefore, the chief remains the chief, and the tradition of centuries makes him an object of fear to the peasant who has chanced to offend him. He can't kill or even fine, nowadays, unless he does it according to Cocker; but a chief with a head on his shoulders can always make things hot for his enemies, can trump up a case against them and have them put in jail, can raise local public opinion against them so that their neighbours look askance at

them, and can worry and irk them in a hundred minor ways. But it is not only fear of the chief that restrains my folk from helping me to lay hands on Mat Rauf. The secret of the fellow's whereabouts is known to half the district, but it is a point of honour with the villagers not to let it out. Their clannishness makes the bare thought of such action a shame, for the man is of the blood, and of the household of their chief; to help us to kill him would be a kind of fratricide in their eyes; so they shudder with fear behind their barred doors, knowing that his hand is against everybody, yet will not raise a finger against him. There is an element of generosity about it, if you look closely; for the villagers are mad afraid—there's no humbug about that—and yet their ideas of the eternal fitnesses, which differ so widely from our own, make them submit to a sort of voluntary paralysis in the face of an imminent peril."

Norris got up from the table and stretched himself. "I'm off now," he said; "thank you very much for my good dinner, as the children say. As for Mat Rauf, it is a beast of a business, and unless I get hold of him soon and stop this panic, I shall be getting my hair pulled by the spirits of wickedness in high places for not having my district in hand. I'm sure that is quite as illogical as any Malay idea could be, but it is the custom of the government, and, as the vernacular proverb says, when we are little we repose in the wombs of our mothers; when we grow up, in the womb of custom. Good-night!"

Next evening, a Malay friend of mine came into the veranda, and when I had invited him to do so five sev-

eral times, and he had made as many half-hearted curtseys in the direction of the floor, he at last consented to seat himself on one of my few chairs. Then, as he sipped coffee and sampled my tobacco knowingly, he told me a little of the gossip of the place.

"There be news from up-stream," he remarked presently. "A pretty tale. Is it not well said that the passions of women be as much more fierce than those of men as is a roaring fire to the spark struck from a stone? Great as the desire of the sand fly, whose ambition it is to swallow a man—such is the desire in the hearts of women—only greater—for women are not content to devour a single man."

My friend was something of a philosopher, and loved to draw moral lessons from the events of his narrow world.

"What is the tale?" I asked.

"'Tis the wife of the Che' Bûyong, *Tûan*—the woman whose sin wrought so much evil to Mat Rauf."

"Mat Rauf was equally guilty," I objected.

"No, *Tûan*; it was not Mat Rauf's sin, for men be ever in love affairs what women choose to make them. If a girl does not lift a saucy lid, engaging in the game of eye-play, showing thereby that an evil thought is nestling in her breast, a man does not dare to dream of her. Without women there were no more sin, for women tempt men, as they have done from the beginning of things in the time of the prophet Adam; not men women, for unless a woman be willing, nought can befall."

"But what is this tale about Che' Bûyong's widow? Long is her name, isn't it?"

“Yes; men call her Che’ Long. The matter is in this wise. As an opium smoker gets *kětâgeh*, addicted to his drug, so that he may by no means leave it, so does a woman who has destroyed the soul of a man become ravenous of heart, longing to add to the number of her kills, till at last she is like unto a *pělěsit*, a familiar spirit, that feasts only on the souls of men. Thus it has been with Che’ Long. Mat Rauf she had destroyed, wherefore she hungered the more to work further harm, being, as I have said, *kětâgeh*. This presently came to the knowledge of Mat Rauf in the jungle, and as his heart was doubtless bitter in that the woman had wrought his undoing, and now was bestowing on others that for which he had suffered, he stole back to her village yester night, and creeping softly underneath the hut to the spot where her sleeping mat was spread—he knew the place, none better—he listened. That which he heard was so little to his liking that presently he drove his spear upward between the bamboo laths of the flooring, through the quilt and mat, transfixing the body of the wicked one, as men spit fish when the poison of the *tûba* sets them floundering along the surface of a river. Folk tell me that it was not only the woman who was wounded; though the hurt sustained by the man, if man indeed there were, was but slight, the force of the thrust being expended upon the body of the woman. It was a very clean stroke—so folk say—and one creditable to Mat Rauf and to the skill of his hand on the spear shaft; and as for the woman, though the white men will doubtless seek to avenge her blood, I hold that the world is well cleansed of such as she. There be too

many wanton ones to lead men aside from their appointed path into the ways of evil, and she and her sisters are food for spears from the beginning, and in the end are destined only to heap the fires of the terrible place!"

And then my friend sauntered out into the night, and passed—unless I wrong him deeply—to a house which should have been no concern of his, there to commit certain indiscretions of his own. Alas for the unequal strife 'twixt precept and practice, it fares no better in this distant sun-steeped land than under the leaden skies of Europe!

After the second murder, the district seemed to become possessed by Mat Rauf for a space. His name was on every tongue; he seemed to be in the atmosphere we breathed; it was impossible to get away from him even for a moment. Jack Norris and I became weary of the sound of his name; we hated him with a mighty hatred, and Jack had his own special grudge against him, for the caustic minutes were beginning to trickle in from headquarters, as he had foretold, pointing the finger of shame at him as though he were the criminal, and soliciting "reasons in writing" on all sorts of trivial issues with the irritating importunity of a Maltese beggar.

It was a sweltering afternoon, and as I walked with bent head along the glaring white road which joined my house to the office, the smear of blue hills across the Pêrak River danced in the heat haze in a fashion which made me feel giddy. In the office, I found Norris sitting at his table in a silk singlet, a pair of duck trousers,

and an execrable temper. One or two Malays were in the room, and in front of Norris, a wild-looking Chinaman, with a shock of coarse hair some three inches in length standing erect all over that portion of his scalp which should by rights have been clean-shaven, stood shamelessly murdering the beautiful Malay language. The Chinaman was dressed in coarse calico dyed blue with indigo, and his feet were caked to the ankles in dry mud, showing that he had walked far and had considered a bath a superfluous luxury. His thin pig-tail, sprouting out of the mass of untidy locks about his neck, wandered down his back, and looked exactly like a strip cut out of the covering of a black hair trunk.

"Sit down and listen to what this chap has to say," said Norris, and I did as he said. "Begin again," Jack continued, turning to the Chinaman.

"On the fifth day of the seventh moon," said the latter, beginning his story with the formula without which no Chinese evidence is complete, "I was walking from the village of Chigar Gâlah to Gûnong Pôndok. I went alone. The jungle is very thick. I was afraid because of Mat Rauf. The Malays said, 'Do not go, the bad man is in the jungle; he will kill you.' I said, 'What can a man do?' I said to myself, 'I no sell goods, I no can live: I no live, then I die; bad man kill me, I die, too. What can one do?' Then I go into the jungle. I took my kandar stick, and at the ends thereof I hung my baskets filled with goods—very valuable goods, worth eighty dollars and sixty-three and a half cents; here is my account book."

He sought in the foul recesses of his filthy coat and

produced a draggled Chinese notebook, with lines in column ruled in red, over the face of which some ill-written hieroglyphics sprawled clumsily.

"That will keep," said Norris. "Get on with your story first, and we'll talk about your losses later on."

"I walked; a long time I walked. Then I met a man, a foreign, red-headed devil. He was a Malay devil. His hair was long because he had been a long time in the jungle. He wore a white coat and black trousers, and he had a red *sârong*. He had a kris at his belt and a spear in his hand. He said to me, 'China *chêlâka!* accursed Chinaman!' and he seized me by the pigtail. Then I knew that he was the bad man. I was very much afraid, and I said 'Don't,' and I caught hold of my pigtail close to the scalp, for I feared that by reason of his pulling he would pluck it out. He hit me in the mouth and cut his knuckle, and he was very angry, and called me a pig and a dog, and I said, 'Don't, bad man.' My baskets had fallen to the ground, and all the goods were scattered about—valuable goods worth eighty dollars and sixty-three and a half cents——"

Again he went through that business with the soiled account book, and again Norris checked him, and he resumed his tale.

"Mat Lauf said to me, 'You have wounded me, China *chêlâka!* and I have a mind to kill you; but there is no profit to be got out of the carcass of a dead beast, and, living, you may serve me. Go free, therefore, leaving these thy goods'—they were excellent goods, worth eighty dollars and sixty-three and——"

Norris growled at him and he collapsed.

“‘Go back to Chigar Gâlah,’ he said, ‘and give my greetings to Kûlop Âsing, and Lop Âli, and Che’ Ngah Lahman the blacksmith, and Pandak Pûlau, and Pa’ Âlang of the hare lip, and Mînah, the wanton, and Mat Daud of Pûlau Kěmbêre, and say that Mat Lauf sends greeting, and presently will come to each one of them—all folk who have done him dishonour—and will rip the life out of them, even as he did unto Bûyong and his wife Long. Let them make ready, for their death day is near at hand, and the manner and the hour of their death shall be of my choosing.’ Thus he spoke, holding fast to my pigtail the while; and I said, ‘It is well, but suffer me to take with my gear, for the goods be excellent goods, worth eighty dol——’ All right, *Tûan*. But he smote me again, but not on the mouth because of my prominent teeth, and he made a rough sound with his voice like a tiger, and I ran away back to Chigar Gâlah and told the people about the loss of my goods of such value, and also the words which Mat Rauf had spoken concerning them. Then they hustled me into a boat and brought me down river to this place, and I was glad to come, for it was in my mind to complain to the *Tûan* about the loss of goods to the value of eighty dollars and six——”

“Take the man away,” said Jack Norris to one of his people, “and bid the court interpreter examine his account book.” Then turning to me, “This business is becoming uglier and uglier, and if there was panic up river before, I don’t know what will happen now. As it is, the people won’t turn out to reap their crops for fear of Mat Rauf, and all the good grain is rotting in the

ear. Then look at this," and he thumped a pile of minute papers lying on his desk; "they all think it's my fault, and want to know why I haven't taken all manner of utterly impossible steps to insure the beggar's arrest. A matter of this sort looks so confoundedly easy from a distance, and explanations are precious little good unless the man who reads them is on the spot to understand them. I tell you that I am so sick of this business that I am meditating something desperate. Come and dine with me to-night, and you shall see what it is."

I went over to Norris's bungalow when the soft evening lights had died out of the sky, and the purr of the insects was slackening into the subdued hum which lasts throughout the warm tropic nights, and at dinner my host declined even to mention Mat Rauf. We were both omnivorous in our reading, and were young enough to be only just making discoveries concerning the fascinations of writers like Thackeray and Carlyle, Froude and R. L. S., and when we got together, we used to make known the results of our explorations to one another with all the gravity of extreme youth. The world held many things which were old and stale enough to many of our seniors, but to us they were as new as the wonders of Eden were to the first man, and we found them very good. When, nowadays, I reread my old favourites, there are memories lurking behind each printed page which were never contained in the mind of the author—memories of things so remote from his experience that, no matter the measure of his omniscience, he could never have pictured them to himself

even in imagination. Uncouth figures of the jungle and the camping ground flit past me; a headlong plunge down a rapid-beset river is enjoyed again with the force and vividness of an actual sensation; I live anew through long hot days spent in the cramped space beneath the awnings of native boats; I see once more the interiors of forgotten Malay huts, and hear the disjointed murmur of talk from the cooking place in the corner; the face of a brown friend springs suddenly into prominence, and vanishes as the real man has vanished from my life: . . . sights such as these, things once so familiar, recur unexpectedly, are beckoned back from the past by a chance sentence, a phrase that struck the fancy and became inextricably associated with the spot in which I first lighted upon it, and the half-savage folk who were my comrades. I can never find words to tell how much I owe to those kind hands which, all unknowingly, ministered to me in my exile and saved me from succumbing to the dry-rot that attacks the minds of those who allow the petty interests of their straitened lives to absorb all their mental energies. 'Tis a debt which may not be repaid, even though a somewhat deeper reverence and a more personal feeling of gratitude than others use be offered as tribute to the great men whom all conspire to honour.

When we had finished the short meal and had taken ourselves and our cigarettes out into the cool of the veranda, beyond the reek of the villainous kerosene lamp, we were presently joined by a little wizened Malay, who shook hands with us solemnly, and seated himself upon a chair in sepulchral silence. I knew him

well. He was a Mëndêhling râja from Sumatrâ, who in the old days, before the white folk brought peace to the western seaboard of the peninsula, had written his name big in letters of blood up and down that war-wracked coast as a fearless leader of mercenaries. His followers had been a crowd of foreign Malays, mostly Mëndêhlings, Râwas, and Měnang-Kâbaus from Sumatra, men devoid of bowels, who loved war and the loot which war brings with it; men utterly devoid of reverence, accustomed to look Death in the face quite light-heartedly, dreading him no more than they feared god or man or devil, all of whom, with the notable exception of their leader Râja Ūteh, they held exceedingly cheap. Like most Malays of tried courage and a vast reputation for personal prowess, Râja Ūteh was as mild and gentle a little man as one would wish to introduce into a lady's drawing room. He was very quiet in his movements, soft-spoken and of few words, and his quaint dried-up face and three-cornered little figure were not calculated to impress the imagination; yet those who had been privileged to see him in a tight place said that he kept a very demon of courage and passion locked up inside that withered body. He was the tool lying ready to Jack Morris's hand with which he hoped to restore peace to his troubled district.

Jack sat up in his long chair, and leaned slightly forward, facing the Râja, who remained absolutely silent.

"I asked you to come here, Ungku," he said, "because I am in trouble." The Râja nodded slightly and his brows were knit.

"You have heard of Mat Rauf?" The Râja smiled slowly, and nodded again.

"We have sought him in vain," continued Jack, "and we cannot learn the place in which he hides. The villagers will not help, for Mat Rauf is of the blood of their chief; moreover, they are very much afraid. Therefore, Ungku, I have sent for you. Are you willing to search for Mat Rauf and to bring him hither to me?"

"I can," said Râja Uteh. These were the first words that he had spoken since he greeted us on his arrival.

"I want him to be arrested, that he may stand his trial for the murder of Bûyong and his wife Che' Long."

"That is well, but if he shows fight, what then, *Tûan*?" asked the Râja.

"If he resists capture, the sin will be on his head. Bring him in, Ungku, alive if possible, but dead if so be that he cannot be captured alive."

"It is well," said Râja Uteh once more, and I fancied that there was a glint in his eye which betrayed his appreciation of the situation; for if all went well, there was pretty sure to be a fight, and such things were hard to come by in these peaceful and monotonous days.

Norris was called down river on some business or other the morning after our talk with Râja Uteh, and I was left in temporary charge at Kuâla Kangsar. I made one or two furtive inquiries as to what had become of the Râja, for he had melted away into the night, and I had seen no more of him. I could get no word of him, however, and it became evident to me that the little man had kept his counsel well, and that the natives of

the district had not an inkling that any steps were being taken to effect the arrest of Mat Rauf.

About 4 A.M., three days later, I was awakened out of a sound sleep by the knowledge that someone was standing by my bedside without the mosquito net, and when I had struck a match I saw it was Râja Ūteh. Our houses in this part of the world have no doors, so that he had been able to walk straight into my bedroom without meeting with any obstacle. I threw my legs over the side of the bed, and sat there rubbing my eyes.

"What is the news, Ungku?" I asked.

"The news is good," he replied mechanically.

"Where is Mat Rauf?"

"I have brought him with me. He is now in the house of stocks" (the police station).

"That is well," I said. "Tûan Norris is absent down river, but he will be very pleased when he learns of this."

"*Tûan*," rejoined the Râja in acquiescence, "but will you come and see Mat Rauf?"

"If he is in the station, let him remain there, and I will come down after daybreak and have speech with him," I said.

"It would be better if you would come now, *Tûan*," said the Râja.

"Why?"

"Because Mat Rauf is dead."

I whistled and began tumbling into my clothes. Then Râja Ūteh and I stumbled down the hill to the little police station, which stood on the fringe of the township that sprawled across the flat land by the

river. In the courtyard at the back of the building I was introduced to Mat Rauf, lying very limp and still on a stretcher, and the thought came to me of the night on which I had last seen him, when he was full of his present troubles, and buoyed up by the hope born of the trivial ambitions which he intended to realize in the future.

They had made a terrible mess of him. A spear thrust had transfixed his heart, there was a grisly kris wound in the abdomen, and someone had discharged the entire magazine of a Winchester carbine into him at such short range that the skin about the bullet holes was scorched and blackened.

Norris returned a few hours later, and I was present when he held the formal inquiry into the cause of death. Râja Ūteh told his tale very simply, and was fully borne out by the two men who had been with him. I will give his story in his own words. "At Chigar Gâlah I heard talk, *Tûan*, and thus I was able to discover the old clearing in which Mat Rauf lay up by night. It was to this place that the chief's folk brought food for him daily. At the hour when the kine go down to water and the cicadæ are heard (about 6 P. M.), I arrived at the edge of the said clearing, and my two followers, Uda and Sěman, were at my heels. Uda carried my many-shooting gun, and Sěman had a kris and a spear. I, too, had my kris, but I was loth to sully it with the blood of a mere outlaw, and I told my men, 'If by any chance he showeth fight, it is for ye to deal with him. I only draw if ye be hard pressed.' Looking out cautiously from behind the trees and bushes of

the jungle, I saw that there was a small hut in the old clearing, a hut such as men use when, for a month or two, they tend the crops to ward off pigs by night and to scare the sparrow birds by day. From behind the angle of the mat wall I saw a knee-cap protruding, and then I knew that Mat Rauf was there.

"We crept forward quietly, so that he might not hear us and so escape into the forest, and when we were close at hand I cried to him: 'O Mat Rauf! It were well for thee to yield thyself into my hands, for thine hour has come!' But he said nothing; only he leaped clear of the hut, bearing his kris and his spear with him, and turning, faced me. Then he rushed toward me and stabbed me shrewdly in the stomach with his spear before I could make shift to leap aside. Look, *Túan!*"

He pointed to a *kain preh*, a long black silk cloth of great thickness, which he had bound round and round his body as a girdle. It was torn through five folds, and under it a long thin scratch showed on the Râja's brown skin. The stab had spent its force on the roll of silk.

"It was a narrow escape, but I was still loth to dirty my weapon with the fellow's blood, so I did not draw my kris. Then Sěman leaned forward and thrust with his spear under my armpit, while Mat Rauf still struggled to withdraw the spear which had become entangled in my girdle. 'Twas a shrewd blow enough, and it took Mat Rauf in the region of his heart. Then Uda fired the many-shooting six times, as fast as he could pull the trigger, and Sěman, who was very angry,

for he is new to fighting, drew his kris and plunged it into Mat Rauf's stomach; but that did not matter, for the first spear-stab had kissed him dead. Mat Rauf never drew his own kris, *Túan*, and if you will examine it, the reason will be made manifest. See, the streak like a crack which runs from the tip of the blade to its base, a *rětak ka-pangkal*, as we name it. 'Tis a sure sign of a treacherous weapon, and arms that bear that mark are wont to betray their masters in the hour of need, causing men to forget that they are provided with a knife, as this kris did to Mat Rauf. It was foolish of him to use a weapon that was so sure to bring about his undoing. Will the *Túan* take it? It is of no use to me."

The chiefs who had abetted Mat Rauf were heavily fined; peace was restored to the district; and, on the whole, Norris was held to have acted in the manner best calculated to serve the greatest good of the greatest number. It is true that one or two of the Singapore newspapers got hold of a distorted version of the incident and held Jack up to public execration as a bloody-minded young pirate, who hired bravos to kill those of his people who chanced to displease him; but east of Suez, where the journalistic language is often as tropical as the climate, no one cares very much for the verdicts of the press. In such small communities, the mystery of awful anonymity does not hang about an editor. Everybody knows him usually as a commonplace little man enough, upon whose judgment nobody specially relies, and he only differs from the rest of us in that he has the extraordinary effrontery to print his

opinions and to expect us to buy them. The press thus becomes a mere personal expression of an individual outlook, not the awe-inspiring abstraction which assumes such monstrous authority as the essence of public opinion in Europe, and men learn to disregard it as a thing of no importance.

This was the end of the story of Mat Rauf, as far as we then knew; but, ten years later, Jack Norris told me a curious incident that happened to him nearly half as many years before, in which he firmly believes that his old enemy was concerned.

He told me the tale one afternoon as we lay in long chairs on the roof of his houseboat while we were journeying up the long reaches of the Pělësu River. Below us, the blunt oval of the punting platform, wet with the drip of boat poles and the passing of bare feet, lay foreshortened curiously. Twelve Malays marched forward with their poles held high above their heads, plunged them into the water simultaneously with a single splash, bent their bodies almost double, uttered a shrill cry in chorus, and plodded swiftly aft with a mighty stamping as they threw all their weight into the punting. As the poles were once more withdrawn, the boat shot forward, waddled a little, then hung almost motionless, hard held by the current, until another violent propulsion from the dozen polers sent it forward anew. The long rays of the afternoon sun put a leaden sheen upon the gliding waters of the river; on either hand, the jungle struggled down to the river's brink, broken here and there by a small cluster of dust-coloured huts nestling beneath palm and fruit trees; in some of the shallows,

the black-and-pink buffaloes were wallowing, or stood knee-deep watching us out of their stupid eyes. The tread of the boatmen, the splash and thump of their poles, the shrill cries, and the insistent screaming of the tree beetles from the forest sounded in our ears; our cheeks were fanned by the breeze caused by the onward motion of the boat; the first suspicion of coming dusk hung over shore and river like some vast hovering bird.

Jack and I had been talking, as was our custom, about every sort of thing in heaven and earth, and at last, I know not how, the subject of the materialization of spirits and their visibility to human eyes became our topic.

"Men don't like to confess that they believe in ghosts," said Norris, "because they think that it shows a feebleness of intellect, like a belief in witchcraft or magic; but, given the fact of an after life, I do not see that there is anything incredible about it."

"I go further than that," I said. "I think that when we speak of such manifestations as being due to something supernatural we assume more than we can at present prove. I decline to believe that we have come to the end of the discoveries which we are destined to make concerning all the natural forces in nature. A hundred years ago, if a man had been told that it was possible for people in the Malay Peninsula to hear all that happens in London or New York within an hour or two of its occurrence, he would have declared that such a marvel could only be wrought by a miracle or by some other supernatural agency. Why should not our

intercourse with the spirit world be governed by natural laws, worked by the means of unknown forces, which are as much a mystery to us to-day as were the properties and the potentialities of electricity to our forefathers? If we are to believe evidence, the evidence of millions of people all the world over, communication with the dead has taken place over and over again during succeeding centuries. In each individual case the conditions may have been favourable to the working of certain laws which we do not at present understand, and that may account for the so-called supernatural manifestations in a perfectly natural manner."

"Yes," assented Norris thoughtfully; "and it would tend to explain why animals, especially dogs, appear to be more sensitive to the presence of spirits than are men. It is not easy to connect a dog with anything supernatural; but if your theory be correct, natural forces might act upon a lower animal, perhaps, more easily than upon a human being."

"Well, I believe that natives are certainly more fitted to see things than are Europeans, and yet the former have by far the less restless and fanciful imagination. The whole thing is a mystery as yet, but I do not believe that it will always remain unexplained; and I think that we ought not to jump to the conclusion that phenomena which we do not understand are necessarily due to supernatural as opposed to natural causes."

Jack was silent for a space, and the darkness crept up from all around the horizon until his face, as I looked at it, was a pale blur against the gathering gloom. Suddenly he spoke.

"I've never told you about the ghost which I saw," he said.

I was startled. Jack Norris, the capable civilian, who ran Pěľsu, now that it was under British protection, with perfect ease and fearlessness, who was loved and feared by every native in that once lawless state, was not the sort of man whom I should have suspected of seeing ghosts. A man must have a certain amount of imagination before he can enter into the life and the thoughts of a native race as Jack had done; but that, when all is said, is merely an abnormal development of a particular set of brain cells, and seems wholly unconnected with the hypersensitiveness generally associated with the seer. On the other hand, I knew him to be both direct and truthful, and, what is even better than the latter, accurate; therefore his remark piqued my curiosity, for it was certain that he at any rate believed that he had seen something remarkable.

"I did not know that you had ever had any experience of the sort," I said. "I wish you would tell me about it."

"I daresay you will think that it is all rot," he began, pulling very hard at his cigarette, and speaking jerkily through the puffs, which was a way he had when slightly embarrassed, "and mine is a bad ghost story, because it is altogether illogical and inconsequent. I am not in the least prepared to quarrel with any one who says that I was the victim of a hallucination, and I do not claim to have been less liable to be mistaken than my fellows. For the rest, I can only tell you about it as it appeared to me, and you can tell me that

it was a clot of mustard or a piece of undigested beef, as Scrooge told Marley's wraith when it came clanking up from the cellar in the basement."

He paused for a moment, and the voices of the Malay boatmen, the swish and plash of disturbed water, the creaking of the boat, the thud of the poles against her side, and the subdued hum of the insect life from the forest on either hand, fitted themselves together into a kind of mosaic of sound, against which the tones of Jack's speech stood out clearly, as it were, when he presently resumed his story.

"As you know, when I first came to Pělěsu, it was a sort of backwater, cut off from the rest of the world by the monsoon and the breakers on the bar from October to March. Occasionally, a fragment of unreliable rumour, distorted by the number of native minds through which it had slowly filtered, would reach us from across the mountains. That was our only substitute for the daily paper of civilization. I used to wonder sometimes during the earlier months what political convulsions might be rending the world beyond our barriers: whether Europe was plunged in war, which of the men and women whom I had known in that other life were still alive, which of them were dead. A little later, I began almost to doubt the reality of any world, of any human existence outside Pělěsu. It all seemed so incredibly remote, so visionary and unsubstantial, like a half-forgotten dream. I used to have to exercise almost physical force to oblige myself to believe in the actual existence of the things which I had known before Pělěsu opened its jaws and engulfed me.

As the months crept by, these things ceased to trouble me. I had lived into the narrow life of Pěleşu, with its delightful king, its gossip, its intrigues, its wickedness, its simplicity, so completely that for a time it occupied all my attention, all my interest. It satisfied me. The soul-stirring little events, which usually meant bloodshed, crowded one upon the other in those days, each one of them a stone added to the great cairn which the king was building to mark the grave of his independence. It was all history on a small scale, and I was helping in the making of it. It had its own peculiar fascination: perhaps you can understand it. At any rate, I was content, well set in my groove. If I had never been disturbed again by the white men whom I was fast forgetting, I believe that I could have lived that life quite happily to the present time, though it is a weary while ago! Perhaps I was young enough and small enough to be satisfied with petty things and a narrow world. Anyhow, I was happy, and the danger in which I went by day and by night during all those months added the spice of excitement that was needed to make my well-being complete.

“Every man’s hand was more or less against me and mine at that time, for I was the thin end of the wedge thrust under the foundation-stones of ancient things by the relentless British Government. You could not expect me to be popular, and the wiseacres of Pěleşu were perpetually discussing the advisability of knocking me out. So many of them believed at that time that they were strong enough to fight the white folk that the idea did not seem so wild to them as it would now. I

had brought a few fellows with me from the West Coast—Malays who were pals of mine, and came with me for the lark of the thing. There were about twenty of us after Râja Haji Hamid had been called away, and Râja Ūteh was the chief. You remember Râja Ūteh? Yes, the man who killed Mat Rauf in the old days. He was a good little chap, and as plucky as they make 'em. There are precious few men, white or brown, whom I would rather have with me in a tight place than that little dried-up chip of Sumatran royalty.

“I lived a great deal among my people, for they were all good friends of mine; and I never regretted the familiarity, for they did not dream of taking advantage of it. Our house was a great straggling place, three of four huts joined together, running out on piles over the river, and our bathing place was a bamboo raft moored to the ladder steps at the back door. When you had climbed down to it, you looked out across the water to the islands a couple of hundred yards away, and up and down stream without impediment, for our house ran further toward the river than any of the others near it. It was completely detached from its fellows, and the nearest building to it was a bathing hut in which all sorts of people used to do their daily washing.

“There was always a lot of talk going on among my people—talk about local politics, local scandals, the prospects of a row, which used to fill them with unholy glee, the merits of the cocks in training for a fight, the valour or the cowardice of the king's warriors, and half a hundred other things such as Malays love to

yarn about. I used to listen and join in the talk when the spirit moved me, and the natives were so used to my presence and to the fact that I understood them that they let me see more of their real selves, I fancy, than often happens when the white and the brown come into close contact with each other.

“Well, presently I began to notice that a sort of whisper was running through the house, an undercurrent of suggestion—nothing quite definite, a sort of rumour made up of chance hints, obscure references to something which I did not understand, looks, gestures. The thing was so impalpable that at first I half fancied that it was merely an idea of mine that there was anything unusual troubling my people, but at last I ran right into it. I was sitting yarning with my crowd one night late when I had come in from the palace, when one of my Malays came in from the bathing place at the back with a very gray face—you know the sickly colour natives turn when they are frightened rather badly. ‘He is there again!’ he said breathlessly, and squatted down shivering. Then I began to make inquiries, and I learned that one after another of my men claimed to have seen a ghost sitting on the raft moored at the back of the house. They were very reticent about it, but very positive that there had been and could be no doubt as to the truth of what they said. Râja Ūteh, who would say even less than the other men, was as sure as any of them that there was no mistake about the reality of the thing. The rumour made me uneasy, for I feared that some trick might be being played upon us by the king’s people, either for the

purpose of scaring my men, or else with the object of spying upon us. I went out to the raft and found it lying there, rocking ever so little with the motion of the current. The moon had come out from behind a bank of cloud, and the river lay under its light, shining and beautiful and empty. I saw nothing of any kind, not a sign of life, and I laughed at the superstitions of my men. They did not seem to think the joke a good one, and I noticed that, from that night forward, I heard no more of the ghost. I had been unsympathetic, and the founts of their confidence were dried up so far as that matter was concerned.

"In a very few days, the story had dropped out of my mind. I was having both a busy and an active time, and was fully occupied with the politics and the intrigues of the court, which, unless they were watched with great care, were like to prove too much for my inexperience. A month or six weeks must have passed in this way, and I swear to you that I had not given the ghost a thought for quite half that time. Then, one night, a curious thing happened."

Jack threw away his cigarette, and the little red spark fell swiftly and hissed as it touched the water. The moon had risen, and hung low and ruddy above the bulking masses of forest. Its light was full upon Norris's face. He looked excited, and I fancied that his hand shook slightly as he grasped the arm of his long chair and drew himself up into a more erect position.

"I had been in the palace all the evening, taking part in a rather warm discussion; and I was hot and tired

when I got home at about one o'clock in the morning. I called one of my fellows and bade him bring my towels. Then I slipped off my clothes, put on a bathing cloth, and climbed down the ladder on to the raft. I was just about to steady myself for a dive into the cool water when something, I don't know what, made me pause and look round to my left. Then I saw the figure of a man squatting on the up-river end of the raft. I could only see the outlines of his form, and the face was turned from me. I naturally thought that it was one of my own fellows, and I called out, '*Si-âpa?* —Who is it?'

"There was no answer, but very slowly the figure turned its head, until its face was confronting me, and it looked steadily into my eyes. It was a pale face, surrounded by a shock of black hair which emphasized its pallor, but I seemed to see it quite distinctly for one ghastly second. Don't believe me if you had rather not. It was the face of Mat Rauf!"

Jack paused, and I could hear him drawing his breath quickly and unevenly. He began to roll another cigarette, and he tore the thin paper with his shaking hands. I had never seen him so moved, and had not till then conceived it possible that he should betray such weakness.

"The whole thing must have happened in a flash, in a fraction of a second as we count time, but the impression was as distinct as though I had gazed upon the thing for a lifetime. In a moment, I had scrambled up the stairway in as bad a funk as a man was ever in since the world began, and when I got to the top—it was only

some half-dozen rungs high—I turned and looked again over my shoulder. I had an awful feeling that the thing might be following me, but I looked into empty space. There was no figure on the raft, and it was impossible that any human being could have escaped without the bamboos creaking or the water splashing, and there was ample light whereby to see any one who was swimming away, and not enough cover to conceal a fly. I was shivering like a terrier, shivering and sweating. My heart was pumping like mad, and nothing in the wide world could have tempted me to bathe as I had intended to do that night. Instead, I turned back and went to bed, but it was hours before I slept.

“Next day, I spoke to Râja Ūteh about it, but I could get nothing out of him except that there undoubtedly was a ghost at the bathing raft. He would say nothing as to the identity of the wandering spirit with the man whom he had killed.

“And now comes the absolutely illogical and inconsequent part of the story. A Chinaman who was bathing that night from the hut, twenty yards higher up-stream, was taken by an alligator. Had I not been scared out of having my swim, it is exceedingly probable that I, not he, would have been the victim. An alligator in the Pëlësu River was a very rare object, and I do not suppose that it was unsafe to bathe there once in a decade. Anyhow, that night, it would have been most dangerous, and I was saved by seeing a thing which at the time I was convinced was the wraith of Mat Rauf, who had been killed many hundreds of miles away, five years before, and of whom I had not thought for ages.

You see, the whole thing is absurd. Mat Rauf owed me no debt of gratitude, at any rate, for helping him out of this world—at least, so one would naturally think; and he, dead or alive, would be about the last man I should have expected to interfere on my behalf.

“Anyway, those are the facts as I know them, and you can fit them into your theories as best you can. I don’t expect to be believed. I am quite ready to admit that it may have been a prank played upon me by my senses; but as I can see that pale face with the awful eyes looking into mine as clearly now as I saw it then, it does not appear to me to be reasonable to suppose that it was all imagination. What do you say?”

I said very little. I did not believe in the “clot-of-mustard” theory, and it was impossible to doubt Jack’s good faith. At the same time, I had no workable explanation handy. As for the inconsequence of the sequel: well, natives are so inconsequent, according to our ideas, when they are alive, that it would be futile to seek to analyse their motives when they have crossed the bourne. Also, though we mortals prize life more than most things, it is conceivable that death may wear another aspect to those who have passed.

“To where beyond these voices there is peace.”

THE END

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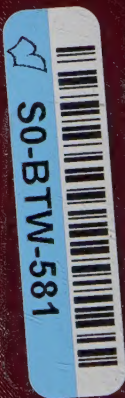
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